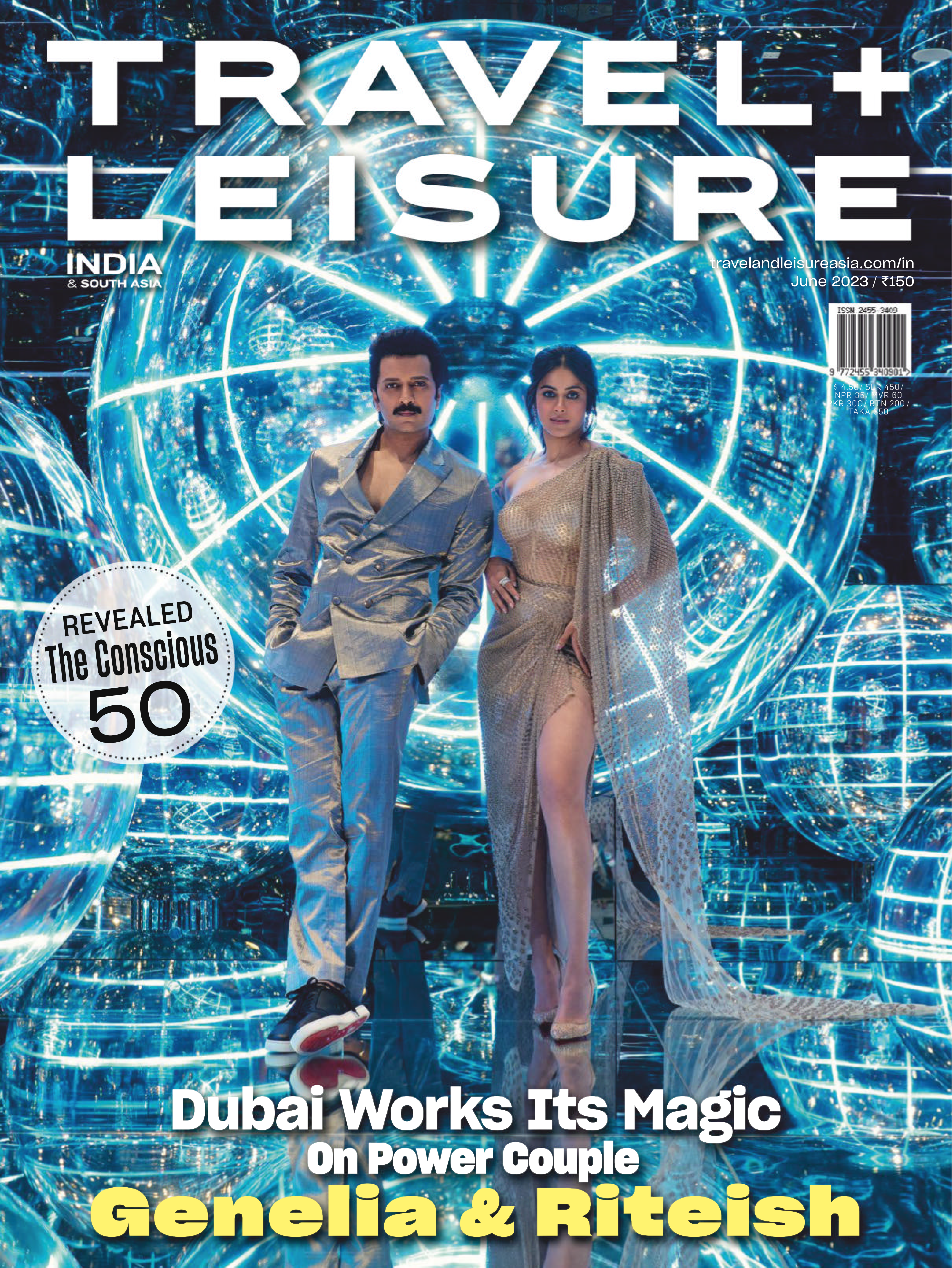

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

INDIA
& SOUTH ASIA

travelandleisureasia.com/in
June 2023 / ₹150

ISSN 2455-3409

9 772455 340901

$ 4.50/ SLR 450/
NPR 35/ MVR 60
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The Conscious
50

Dubai Works Its Magic
On Power Couple
Genelia & Riteish

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TARUN KHIWAL

ON HIM: Suit, **Rohit Gandhi + Rahul Gandhi**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin**; all prices on request.

ON HER: Dress, **Ambika Lal**; jewellery, **JOOLRY**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin**; all prices on request.

▲ *Cover stars Genelia and Riteish Deshmukh dazzle at Harmonia, AYA Universe (p. 28).*

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ON THE COVER:
Actors Genelia and Riteish Deshmukh in Dubai.

PRODUCED BY Bayar Jain & Ishika Laul
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Tarun Khiwal
ASSISTED BY Abhishek Verma & Hussam Nawabzada
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LETTER *from the Editor*

FROM MY TRAVELS
Capturing Dubai's glistening skyline from Sheraton Mall of the Emirates Hotel.

THIS IS A VERY SPECIAL ISSUE for us as it is an ode to one of the most important causes that *Travel + Leisure India and South Asia* stands for. Our annual #**TLConsciousList** encapsulates experiences, destinations, and people who have made mindful choices in both travel and their daily lives. Sustainability champions across the fields of art, entertainment, hospitality, and more share some of the most important lessons on conscious living—be it actor Dia Mirza (*p. 62*), activist Aakash Ranison (*p. 64*), hotelier Sonu Shivdasani who transformed luxury travel in the Maldives (*p. 65*), sisters Mrinalika and Akshita Bhanj Deo who were instrumental in putting Mayurbhanj in Orissa on the map (*p. 66*); or sustainable fashion designer Aneeth Arora of Pero (*p. 69*) among others. Don't miss our carefully curated list of some of the most sustainable stays (*p. 50*) and meaningful experiences (*p. 40*) around the world that allow you to engage with local communities and leave a positive impact on the planet.

Keeping in mind that the summer holiday season is in full swing in India, we take you along a family holiday with social media's favourite star couple Genelia and Riteish Deshmukh. The couple explores some of the newest attractions that Dubai—the most popular destination among Indian travellers—has on offer (*p. 28*). Also find out the best places to eat and shop in the city with our comprehensive guide (*p. 8*). In our other stories, we traverse Nagaland on a foraging mission (*p. 76*); and embark on a slow boat ride from Thailand to Laos (*p. 80*).

Before I sign off, let me remind you to catch all the action of *Travel + Leisure India*'s Delicious Dining Awards 2023. Stay tuned to our Instagram for the big reveals!

Aindrila

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TRAVEL+LEISURE INDIA & SOUTH ASIA
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Clean Cuisine

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Delicious Dining Awards 2023

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Discoveries

A GLOBETROTTER'S GUIDE TO THE LATEST IN TRAVEL

10 EXCITING STOPS TO ELEVATE YOUR Dubai TRIP

Well-earned reputation for glamour aside, Dubai manages to impress every kind of traveller. Whether you're a gourmand or culture vulture, travelling solo or with your family, Dubai has iconic answers to your every demand.

BY SHRIMAYEE THAKUR

Dubai's myriad and exciting offerings draw travellers from all walks of life throughout the year.

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is simply to disconnect.

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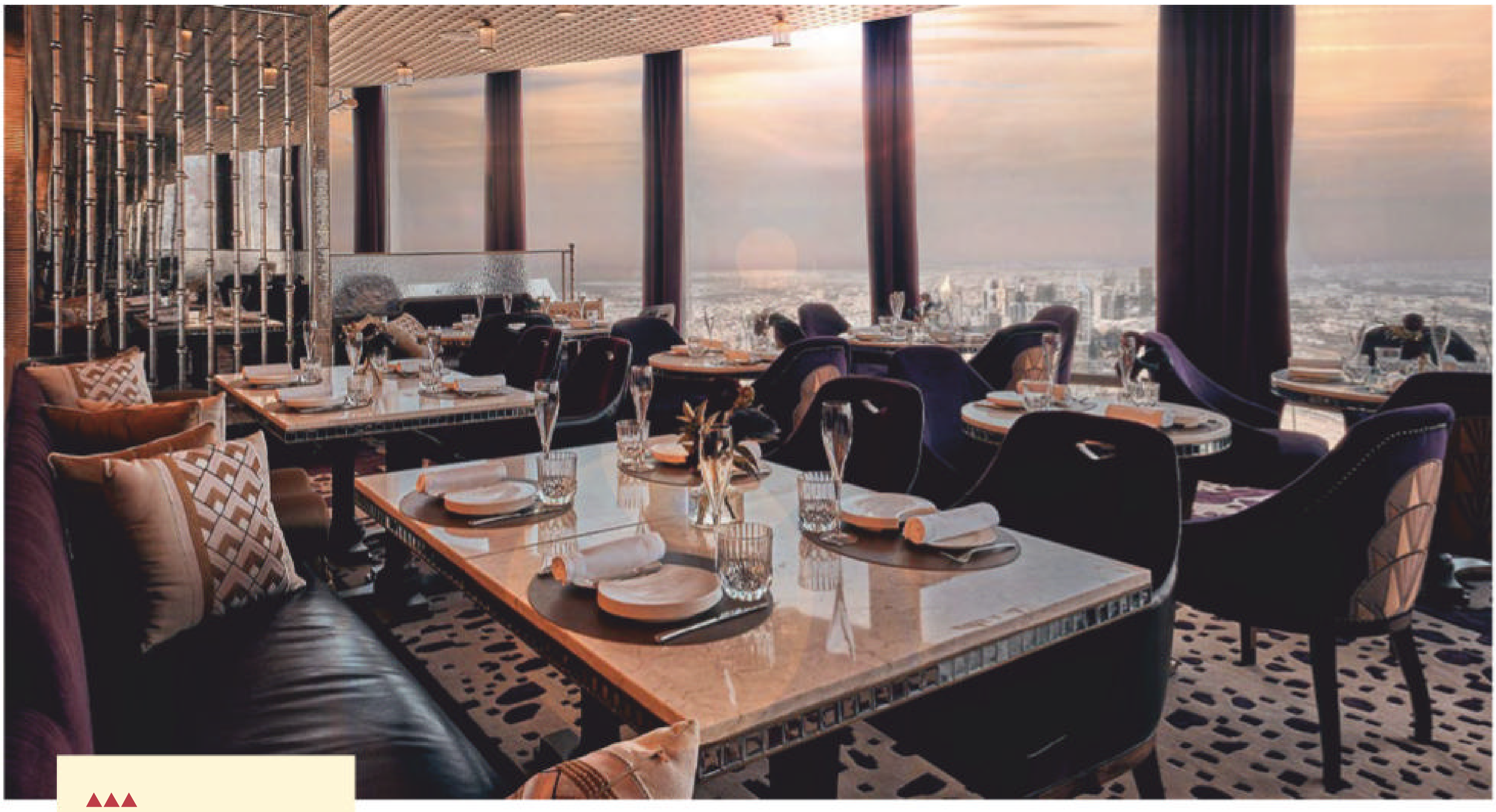
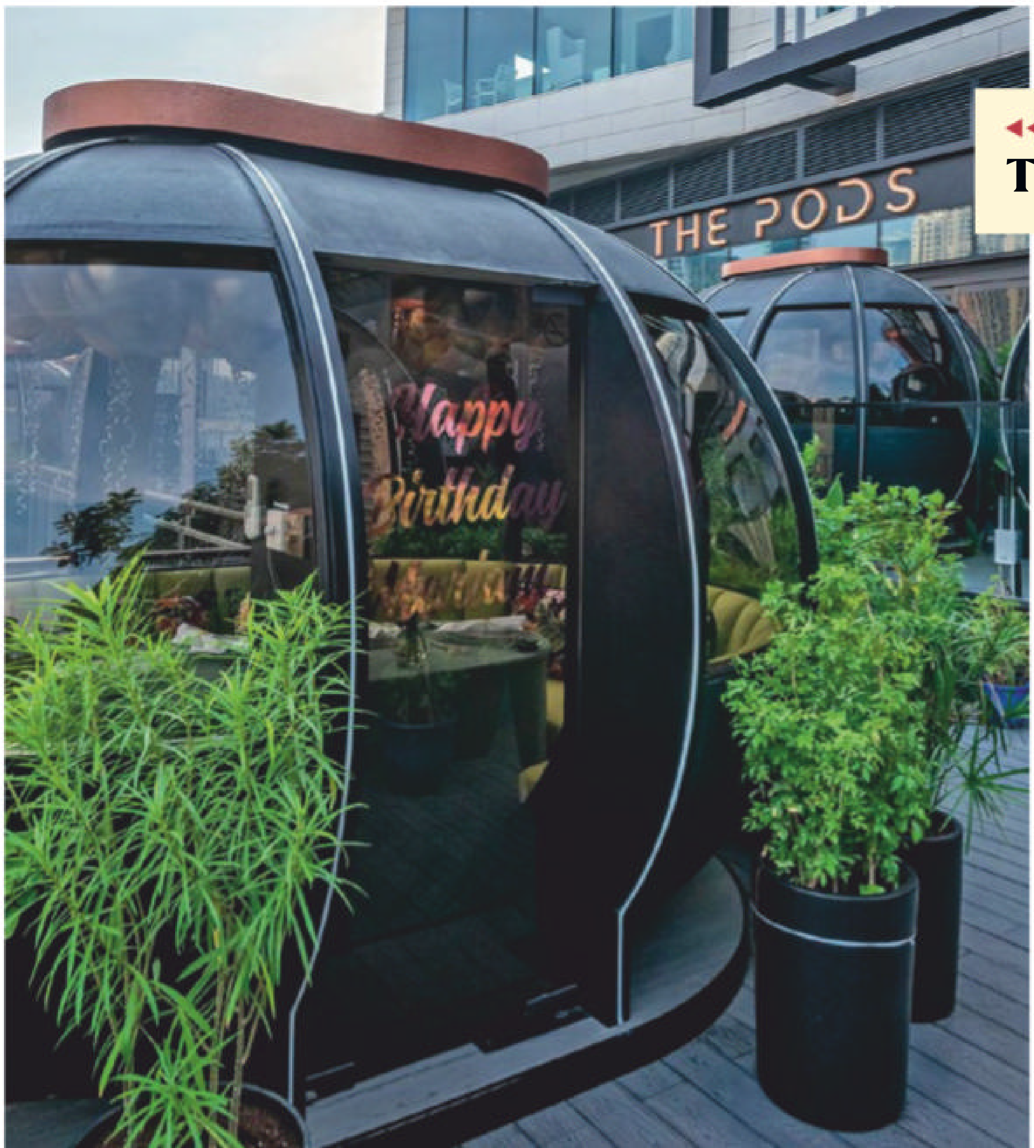


At.mosphere Restaurant and Lounge

With multiple prestigious awards, At.mosphere Restaurant and Lounge is, quite literally, on top of the world and is one of the highest restaurants in the world. Located on the 122nd floor of the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, this lofty restaurant offers guests a unique dining experience with a bird's eye view of Dubai. Reopened this year after closing last summer for renovations, At.mosphere Restaurant and Lounge features refreshed interiors–mosaic floors, gold accents, mirror facades, dark wood, and ceiling-to-floor glass panes that look out to Dubai. As you dine among the clouds, the only thing that can compete with the staggering view is the food. The restaurant's exquisite menu features an array of modern French cuisines for any meal of the day. Can't choose what to eat? Try a bit of everything with their 13-course blind tasting menu, accompanied by the perfect beverages selected by their sommelier. *atmosphereburjkhalifa.com*



The Pods

Ditch crowded restaurants and opt for a private dining experience at The Pods, a restaurant on Bluewater Island, where, as the name suggests, meals are served in air-conditioned domes. Whether your group is big or small, the 22 pods of varying sizes will be able to give you the perfect intimate atmosphere for an excursion with your loved ones. Each pod is surrounded by lush, green plants, while the interior features a comfortable green sofa wrapped around the table. The domes are transparent, allowing you to have an 'outdoor' dining experience while being protected from external elements. Adding to the VIP experience, each pod is privately serviced to provide quick and personalised service. Choose from a menu of pan-Asian delicacies with a modern touch. One can choose from dishes like authentic Japanese sushi, rock lobster with truffle, or *robatayaki* grills accompanied by a signature cocktail, and finish up with a *mochi* or two. *thepods.ae*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF AT.MOSPHERE RESTAURANT AND LOUNGE; COURTESY OF THE PODS

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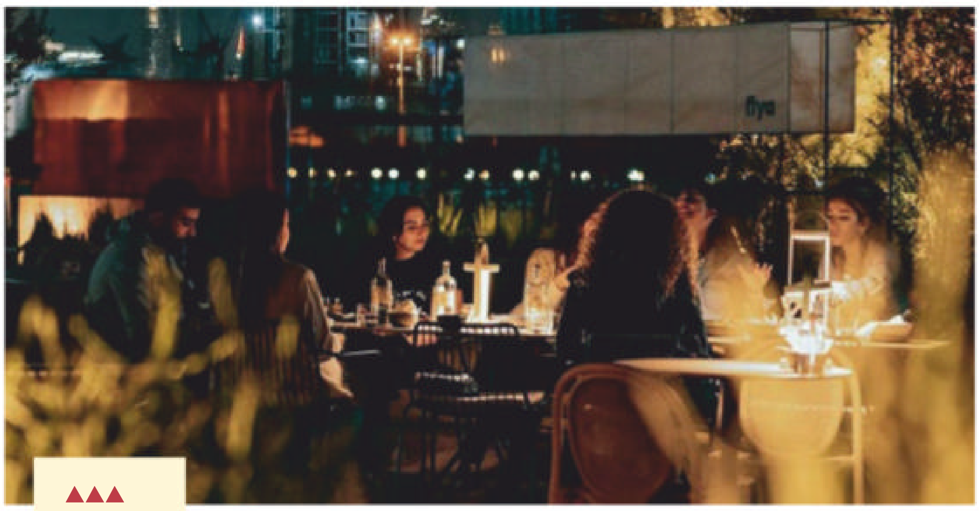
KRASOTA Dubai

Looking for dinner and a show? KRASOTA Dubai, offering both, is one of Dubai's most expensive restaurants for a reason. Described as a 'gastronomic immersive theatre', KRASOTA Dubai combines haute cuisine with a visual spectacle in a one-of-a-kind culinary experience. Instead of a regular restaurant dining room, a maximum of 20 guests are seated at a time in an auditorium, with 360° screens and imagery projected onto every surface, including the walls and the table itself. Chef Vladimir Mukhin is the mastermind behind the curated dinner, which features an amuse-bouche to start with, followed by eight courses. These courses are accompanied by eight visual acts and a bespoke dish for each act, and two signature drinks that are served in the intervals. Famous masterpieces—by eight internationally renowned artists—from the late 19th and early 20th centuries are presented throughout the performance. The restaurant is open every day, with two seatings per day. *krasota.art*

Illuminati

UAE's first luxury experiential lounge, Illuminati, in V Habtoor Hotel, is named after the highly exclusive society founded in the 18th century in Germany. Password-protected entry, tarot card readers, and performances where characters from fairy-tales come to life—a dinner at Illuminati is filled with mystery, mysticism, and never-ending entertainment. State-of-the-art AI in 3D wall-mapping and walls fitted with LED screens perfectly complement the ethereal aura of the club. Performers drop from false ceilings and perform reality-defying acts or sing popular songs to serenade guests. The entire menu is at your fingertips, along with the option to order food and pay instantly with the AI-backed touchscreen panels at the tables. Choose from bespoke fusion cuisines, signature drinks conceptualised by innovative mixologists, and in-house shisha creations. *hilton.com*



FIYA

Located in Keturah Reserve, FIYA is the latest offering of lauded chef Hattem Mattar. Specialising in live-fire cuisine, FIYA draws its name from the Persian word for fire, and describes itself as 'a unique place to gather and connect, driven by memories, stories, and people—and most importantly 'FIRE'. Its four fire-cooking arenas and open grill make up its open kitchen, allowing guests to mingle with the chefs, while 1000-year-old olive trees adorn the background. Among FIYA's melt-in-the-mouth meat dishes is the signature smoky brisket, a must-try according to the chef himself. Those looking for vegetarian options might enjoy the charcoal grilled little gem Caesar salad, topped with spicy rocoto pepper. FIYA is open on all days except Monday. *fiyadxb.ae*

CLOCKWISE: COURTESY OF KRASOTA DUBAI; COURTESY OF ILLUMINATI; COURTESY OF FIYA

Gold Souk

The origins of the iconic Gold Souk can be traced back to over a century ago. It is here that luxury and tradition meet. Even if you do not plan to buy gold, a walk through the market's covered walkways to see glittering displays of jewellery and traditional crafts, and eager customers haggling with shopkeepers is an experience in itself. Apart from the intricately-designed gold jewellery, retailers in the market also sell loose diamonds, precious stones, pearls, and silver for those looking to customise their pieces. If you're looking for a souvenir, get your hands on traditional Arabic handicrafts such as rugs, carpets, textiles, pottery, glassware, and other trinkets. The best time to visit the market is in the evening, when it's at its vibrant best. For a more unique way to see the market and the Dubai skyline, take a traditional wooden *abra* boat across Dubai Creek.

Dubai Mall

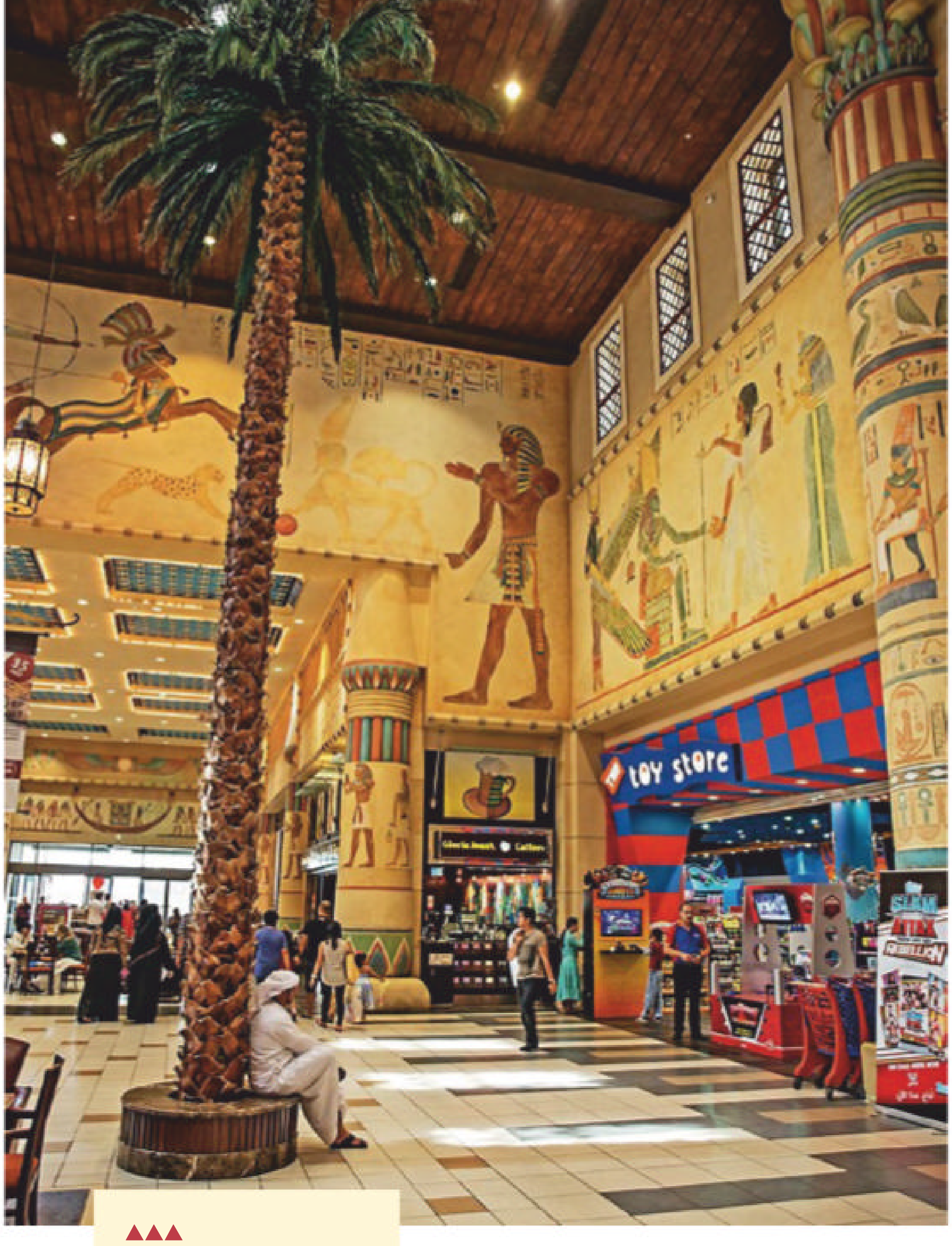
Dubai Mall is the most visited retail and lifestyle destination in the world–over 100 million visitors every year–featuring over 1,200 stores, hundreds of food and beverage outlets, and a plethora of entertainment options. Update your wardrobe at any of the high-end designer stores, including Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Chanel; or wander into Fashion Avenue, a section of the mall that showcases the latest trends in fashion and houses some of the most exclusive designer stores in the world. Take 'gram-worthy pictures at the cascading waterfall designed to provide the illusion of the sculptures of men moving instead of the water. For a dose of adrenaline, scuba dive with sharks at the Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo, one of the largest aquariums in the world. Food options at the mall range from fast food joints to gourmet eateries. Other sites of interest include Dubai Fountain, ice skating rink, and a cinema complex. *thedubaimall.com*

FROM TOP: GREG BALFOUR EVANS/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK

Shop

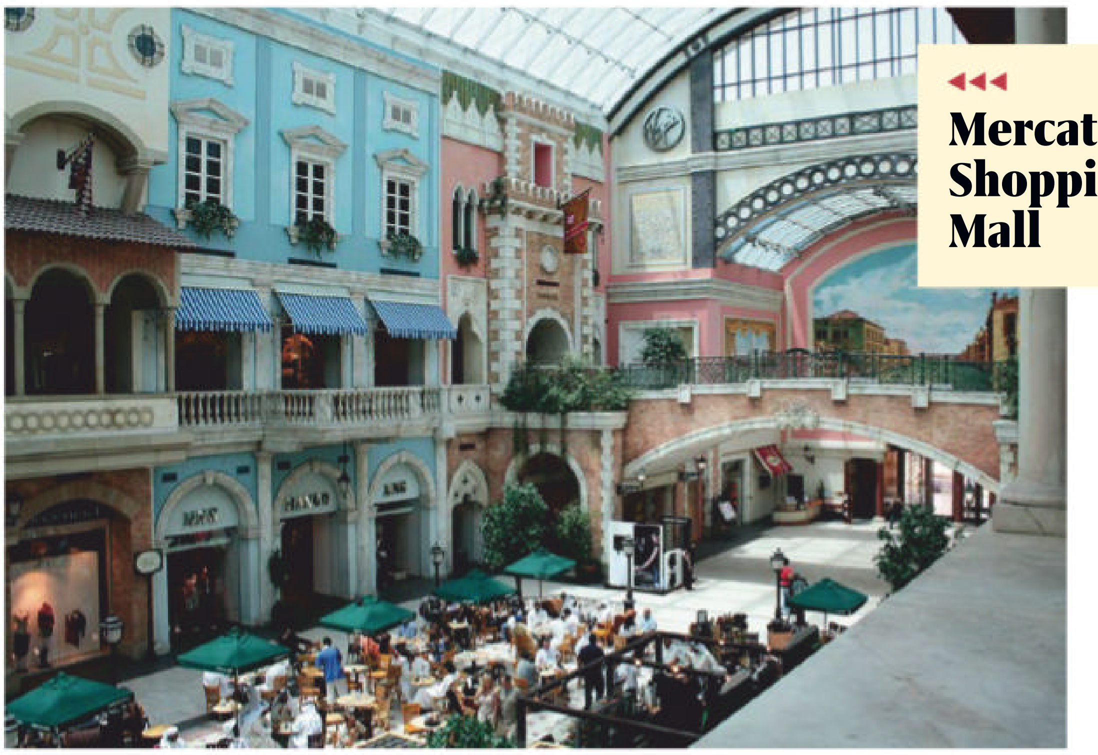
Jumeirah Emirates Shopping Boulevard

Jumeirah Emirates Shopping Boulevard is a luxury shopping and dining destination in the heart of the Jumeirah neighbourhood that would please even the most discerning shopper. It offers an exclusive collection of stores that allows for more careful perusing. A mix of international and local luxury brands, fashion and lifestyle boutiques, and stores for accessories and fragrances await shoppers at the two-storey plaza. The plaza houses brands like Cartier, Damas les Exclusives, Rivoli, Lanvin, Rodeo Drive, and Chloe and celebrities being spotted here is quite a routine. La Cantine du Faubourg is one of the most popular places for a decadent meal here. Take a stroll afterwards in the vast garden, complete with waterfalls, lakes, and public seating to wrap up your day. *jumeirah.com*



Ibn Battuta Mall

Named after the eponymous Arabian explorer, Ibn Battuta Mall is the largest themed shopping mall in Dubai. Divided into six themed courts, each court is named after a region that the explorer visited—Andalusia, Tunisia, Egypt, Persia, India, and China. While the central dome of India Court is inspired by Taj Mahal and Hawa Mahal, China Court reflects the majesty of Imperial China and has a huge Chinese ship in the middle. Persia Court, on the other hand, has magnificent blue mosaic walkways, and Egypt Court's sandstone walls have hieroglyphics carved into them. White-washed stucco facades adorn Tunisia Court, Battuta's first port of call, and his last, Andalusia, has a court with a star-shaped ceiling and Fountain of Lions. The mall's numerous shopping outlets cater to high-end luxury indulgences, and electronic and household items. *ibnbattutamall.com*



Mercato Shopping Mall

Designed to look like a traditional Italian village, Mercato Shopping Mall is located in Jumeirah, and offers a relaxed ambience and personalised experience in its 140 plus stores. Spinneys, an Arabian supermarket chain, and Virgin Megastore, an international chain, are two of the more popular stores. Young children will love Fun City, a play area for kids between the ages of one to 12, with an array of activities and games. When you get tired of shopping, wander the cobbled streets of the mall to explore its diverse range of eateries offering international culinary delights. Mercato Shopping Mall also plays host to events and exhibitions throughout the year, such as fashion shows, live music performances, and cultural festivals. *mercatoshoppingmall.com*

SHUTTERSTOCK (3)

The Ritz-Carlton, Doha offers breathtaking views of the Marina, Arabian Gulf, The Pearl, and Lusail City.

A Royal Affair

The Ritz-Carlton, Doha is the epitome of luxury and impeccable service, and offers stunning views, award-winning dining options, and exceptional event planning services. BY RALAN KITHAN

Nestled along a private stretch of pristine sandy beach and strategically located within the city, The Ritz-Carlton, Doha offers breathtaking views of the Marina, Arabian Gulf, The Pearl, and Lusail City. The property is the benchmark of luxury in the heart of Qatar and boasts opulence and sophistication. With a legacy of over 22 years—it is the first luxury hotel brand in Doha—this exceptional property has earned widespread acclaim for its superior service culture and commitment to excellence.

Elevating the gastronomic experiences to new heights, The Ritz-Carlton, Doha boasts seven remarkable restaurants and lounges. Led by a team of talented chefs, each culinary destination has a unique personality, yet embraces the common ethos of handcrafted inventive dishes that use the finest ingredients.

B-Lounge, affiliated with the renowned Buddha-Bar brand, entices diners with its fusion of Asian cuisine and vibrant lounge atmosphere. Sel & Miel, the in-house brasserie, is celebrated for its exceptional French fare, and STK Doha redefines the steakhouse concept and offers the best meat cuts. The restaurant seamlessly caters to diverse palates, courtesy of a menu that features meat-free options, seafood choices, and indulgent desserts. For moments of relaxation, there is Lobby Lounge that exudes Arabian warmth, offering delightful pastries, light bites, and signature afternoon tea.

The property is also well-known for its expertise in curating extraordinary events—right from henna parties and bridal showers to female and male gatherings. There is a dedicated team—with remarkable skills in planning and execution—that ensures every wedding retains a personal touch.

With equal proficiency in Arabic and international cuisine, the culinary team also adds to the entire experience. These experts create exquisite menus for every occasion—whether it's a formal dinner, gourmet buffet, or live stations. The pastry chef also adds a touch of magic by crafting magnificent wedding cakes that fulfill the bride and groom's unique vision.

Among other facilities at The Ritz-Carlton, Doha are the air-conditioned indoor squash and tennis courts, a well-equipped gym, junior-sized Olympic pool, and a freeform beachfront pool that invites guests to unwind. For a truly serene experience, The Ritz-Carlton Spa, Doha offers rejuvenating treatments that pay homage to Qatar's rich heritage.

The outdoor pool at The Ritz-Carlton, Doha.

For more information, visit *ritzcarlton.com/doha*

FAMILY ODYSSEY

Unforgettable family getaways unfold at New South Wales' sun-kissed golden beaches, architectural marvels, and verdant national parks. **BY BAYAR JAIN**

FREQUENT FLIERS WILL agree that flying with Singapore Airlines (*singaporeair.com*) is an apt way to begin a memorable holiday in Australia's New South Wales. The airline offers daily seamless connections to Sydney from eight cities across India, and your world class experience begins the minute you set foot in the aircraft. Stay entertained with your favourite TV shows and movies, and bookmark them so that you can pick up where you left off on your return flight. Savour delectable meals 30,000 feet in the air, use the inflight Wi-Fi to stay connected, or simply slip into a cosy slumber in spacious seats that come with ample legroom across all cabins. The airline also has special child-friendly meals and activity packs to keep the young ones happy in the sky.

Famed for a glistening coastline and lush national parks that house a variety of flora and fauna, New South Wales ticks all the boxes for a fun-filled family vacation. Take its capital city Sydney, for instance. There is a generous dose of art, history, and culture at the iconic Sydney Opera House—which celebrates 50 years this year—whose white facade shines against the deep blue waters of the

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Clockwise from here: Whale watching at Jervis Bay; Singapore Airlines, with its delicious meals and spacious seats is the apt way to begin a holiday; sail past iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge with your family.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DESTINATION NSW; L MCGILLIVRAY; COURTESY OF SINGAPORE AIRLINES

◂

Clockwise from left: Fireworks light up Sydney Harbour during New Year's Eve; travellers can admire koalas in their natural habitat at Taronga Zoo Sydney; Bondi Beach is a surfer's paradise.

harbour. Inside, a range of shows awaits. In fact, every week, this UNESCO World Heritage Site hosts over 40 shows! Think operas, ballets, and even comedy sets and rock performances.

Beyond the waters, another famous landmark lines the horizon—Sydney Harbour Bridge. Scale its steel arches and learn more about the city's Aboriginal history with BridgeClimb's Burrawa Indigenous Experience. Upon summitting the structure, take a moment to enjoy panoramic views of the city. Families with toddlers can make the most of this experience by walking along the protected pedestrian path instead. Irrespective, the sceneries will leave you spellbound.

Also at the harbour is Sydney's loved Luna Park. A restored 1930s amusement park, this fun space houses rides that appeal to all age groups. Add to this quintessential carnival goodies like sliders, popcorn, and fairy floss, and you have the perfect recipe for a fun-loaded family outing. For more aquatic fun, float along the pristine waters on a ferry. These services start from Circular Quay and extend to harbourside destinations including Taronga Zoo and suburbs such as Balmain, Kirribilli, Manly, and Parramatta.

But Sydney is more than just a coastal city; it wows with its inland offerings too. Admire koalas as they sit atop eucalyptus trees at Taronga Zoo Sydney; enjoy waterside fun at Wild Life Sydney Zoo; hop alongside kangaroos, Tassie devils, and wombats at the Sydney Zoo; or opt for an adrenaline packed Shark Dive experience at Sea Life Sydney Aquarium where grey nurse, Port Jackson, and wobbegong sharks swim past you.

No visit to the Land Down Under is complete without a visit to its many stunning beaches. In fact, New South Wales houses 892 beaches, of which 100 are in Sydney alone! The city's legendary Bondi Beach is one such spot. A space where the city meets the ocean, this surfer's paradise is ideal to get acquainted with the water sport, unwind at the swimming pool of Bondi Icebergs Club, or even enjoy the protected waters of the famed ocean pools.

At Manly Beach—accessible via a ferry from Circular Quay—guided snorkelling tours take you and your family to the protected Cabbage Tree Marine Reserve that not only houses blue gropers, but also wobbegong sharks and shimming nudibranchs or sea slugs. Alternatively, stay on shore and savour scrumptious dining options along the esplanade. Further ahead at Jervis Bay, less than three hours south from Sydney, you can enjoy at Murrays Beach—part of the Oyster Coastline on South Coast—where turtles and families of squid often pop out to say hello. Enjoy a round of whale watching or consider heading to oyster farms to shuck your own meal. Squeeze in a visit to Paperbark Camp where the peaceful bush setting crafts the ideal experience for families looking for downtime accentuated with style, sustainability, comfort, and luxury.

Located only two hours from Sydney, Port Stephens where giant sand dunes provide the backdrop for exhilarating experiences. Sip on fresh beer brews at B Farm by Murray's or go glamping in a Koala habitat at Port Stephens Koala Sanctuary. And before you bid adieu to the Port, opt for a dolphin tour to see Bottlenose dolphins jump about in the azure waters.

And if you find yourself spoilt for choice, sit back and watch the sun melt into the horizon from wherever you are—it'll be a memorable family vacation for sure! *visitnsw.com* ✚

DESTINATION NSW (3)

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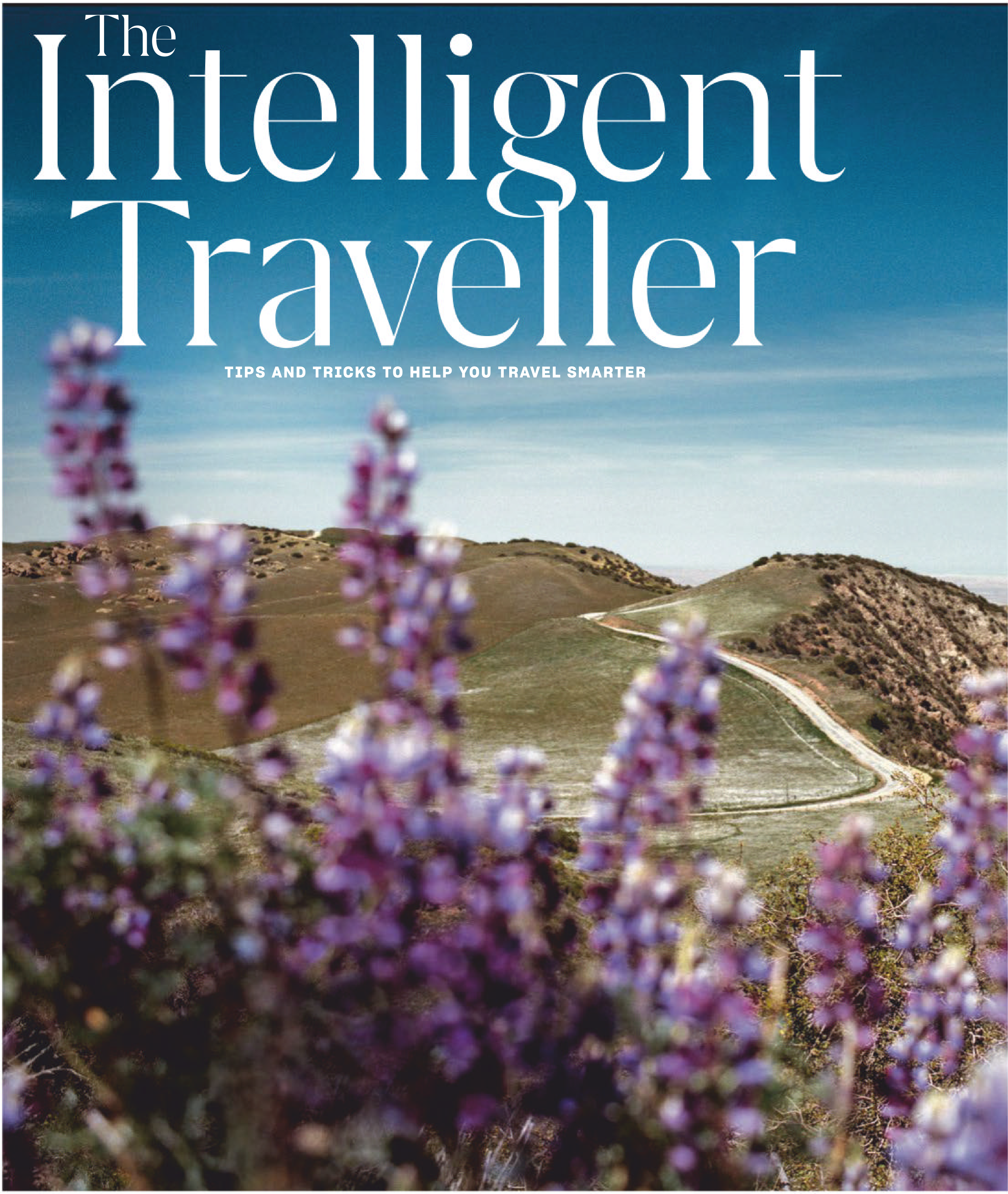
The Intelligent Traveller

TIPS AND TRICKS TO HELP YOU TRAVEL SMARTER



Wildflowers at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, near central California's Carrizo Plain. Right: The pool at Cuyama Buckhorn, a recently revamped 1950s motel.

JESSICA SAMPLE

DESERT BLOOM

Famous for its riotous spring wildflowers, California's Cuyama Valley has new reasons to visit, thanks to a growing creative community of hoteliers, winemakers, and artisans.

BY RYAN BRADLEY

I MUST HAVE BEEN about 10 years old when I first glimpsed the Cuyama Valley. My family and I were driving home from my aunt's place in northern California when, about two hours north of Los Angeles, my father spontaneously decided to turn off the main highway. What I most vividly recall, almost three decades later, was realising that I was suddenly somewhere quite different from anywhere I'd ever been.

There were windswept plains, beautiful and desolate, flanked by two mountain ranges—one deeply creased and barren, the other scrubby and oaky, golden and green. Very occasionally, we saw signs of human habitation along the two-lane road. It was as though we had stepped not merely back in time but outside of it.

I have returned to this empty-seeming place over the years, most often to pitch a tent on the Carrizo Plain—one of the last remaining ancient grasslands in the United States. Carrizo is one valley over from Cuyama, and both are famous for the explosion of spring wildflowers that, after a rainy winter, can turn into glorious super-blooms, like some giddy god took a paintbrush to the land.

Flowers are the big draw here, although they're fleeting, lasting only a few weeks in the spring. Rough camping on the plain can be a tough sell. Usually, when I drove out, I went alone.

Even when I was away from the place, I kept checking in on it, via message boards and wildflower hotlines. This was likely

CUYAMA
BUCKHORN

From top: Em Johnson and Jack Forinash, directors of the Blue Sky Center, a community-development organisation in the Cuyama Valley; cacti on the grounds of the centre; the smokehouse platter at Cuyama Buckhorn.

why my Instagram algorithm showed me the **Cuyama Buckhorn** *(doubles from $20,268; cuyamabuckhorn.com),* a recently updated motel in the town of New Cuyama. It looked charming, desert-chic, and much cosier than camping—the kind of place I might bring my wife and two young kids. So I did.

CUYAMA BUCKHORN opened in 1952, with a design by George Vernon Russell, the architect behind the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas and other classic mid-century buildings. Today the Buckhorn's motor court has been transformed into an oasis dotted with olive trees, lounge chairs, and firepits where, come nightfall, guests roast s'mores and sip mezcal. My family and I arrived before check-in time, so we had lunch at the Buckhorn's restaurant. A few guys from a Caltrans road crew sat at the counter, wolfing down burgers; a vinyl booth was filled with sunburned, binocular-toting retirees. An obscure Townes Van Zandt track wafted through the speakers. The place felt shiny and new, but also well-loved.

Our room was peppered with local character: an old cowboy hat, a well-worn trail guidebook. That evening—and every evening—we sat on the patio outside our room and watched the light play across the sweep of the plain. Over the next few days, we gave in to the charms of the high desert valley as they unfolded at their natural pace—slowly and deliberately. We meandered up rough roads that disappeared into the hills and led to hidden, wildflower-filled washes, oak woodlands, and secret creeks.

But the greatest asset of the place was soon revealed: the folks who call Cuyama home. Jeff Vance and Ferial Sadeghian, the architect-designers and business partners who own the Buckhorn, discovered this six years ago, soon after they bought the motel. Vance, who grew up in Los Angeles, fell hard for the region in his youth, and returned to it often. Then he met the Iran-born Sadeghian, who dreamed of opening a hotel akin to the little chef-owned properties she had once visited in Provence. One day, out for a drive, they saw that the boarded-up Buckhorn was for sale.

A few weeks after they'd bought the property there was a gathering for farmers and ranchers at the **Blue Sky Center** *(blueskycenter.org),* a rural-development nonprofit down the street. There, Vance and Sadeghian met the vintners of the wine they'd soon be selling, the farmers of the produce they'd feature on their menu, the ranchers whose beef they'd buy.

"We're all up here together," Vance told me one night at the Buckhorn bar. "If somebody has a problem, it's everyone's problem." Sadeghian jumped in. "I was driving up here one day and realised, if something goes wrong, I would rather get stuck here than anywhere. There are just so many people around I could call on to help."

Much of the credit for this communal feeling goes to the Blue Sky Center, which occupies several large buildings erected by the Richfield Oil Corporation in the early 1950s. Richfield became ARCO, and in the 1970s, ARCO left, along with most of the region's jobs. Still, Cuyama held on, primarily through agriculture. (It's said the baby carrot was invented here in 1984.) But betting on crops is perilous in a place where rainfall averages just eight inches a year—which is where Blue Sky comes in. Its goal is to both support the community and expand it, pulling in creative entrepreneurs and tourists alike. It even hosts paying guests in a covered wagon and similar-looking huts.

One afternoon, I toured a group of former Richfield buildings with Jack Forinash, Blue Sky's executive director. The buildings are now filled with artisans' workshops: **High Desert Print Co.** *(highdesertprint.com),* a screen-printing and design outfit; **Warrior Wagons** *(madeincuyama.com),* which restores classic "woody" cars; and **Cuyama Beverage Co.** *(cuyamabeverage.com),* a mead maker. All of these, Forinash suggested, were living, breathing business cards for the community. The labels of those mead bottles, for instance, make hidden Cuyama more visible when the drink is sold in boutiques in Los Angeles or Santa Barbara.

Plenty in Cuyama is still off the beaten path, though. Another afternoon we drove to a hilltop vineyard called **Condor's Hope** *(condorshope.com).* When Steve Gliessman and Robbie Jaffe first planted vines in 1995, the California condor—the largest bird in North America—was close to extinction and an aggressive captive-breeding programme was under way. Starting in 1992, some of the birds had been reintroduced into a nearby national forest, and the couple would see them flying overhead.

Gliessman and Jaffe are agroecologists. The idea is in the title: fold ecology into agriculture, let the characteristics of the land inform what you plant and how you treat it, and you create a system that is no longer working against nature but within it. What this means practically is quite radical. "No, we don't irrigate," Gliessman told me as we strolled among his vines, which were gigantic, like gnarled old candelabras. The hardy plants lose fewer grapes than most during prolonged droughts and winter freezes. "The grapes are smaller," Gliessman explained. "The skins are thicker." The wine tastes better, too.

Gliessman looked out over his vineyard toward a magnificent valley oak—easily hundreds of years old—where a pair of bluebirds were nesting and where my wife was now resting with our baby son. "I like to think that Robbie and I are old vines," he said. I thought about the condors, and how, these days, they number in the hundreds in the wild. I knew exactly what he meant. ✢

GETTING THERE

Air India (*airindia.com*) and **Lufthansa** (*lufthansa.com*) operate various connecting flights from New Delhi and Mumbai to Santa Barbara. Cuyama Valley is nearly a two-hour drive from Santa Barbara.

Above: Cuyama Buckhorn's retro-styled lounge area. Below: A tasting at Condor's Hope, with the vineyard's Zinfandel (left) and Pedro Ximénez.

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SUSTAINABLE CHIC

Add a touch of eco chic to your wardrobe with these homegrown sustainable brands. **BY RALAN KITHAN**

1. 18k Gold Plated Silver Apatite Copper Turquoise Necklace, **March by FS Life**, *₹3,795; marchjewellery.com* **2.** Silver-Plated Half Floral Stud Earrings, **trueBrowns**, *₹1,799; truebrowns.com* **3.** Maya Skirt and Crop Top, **Label Rama**, *₹9,700; labelrama.com* **4.** Pave Circle Earrings, **Itara**, *₹25,450; itarajewelry.com* **5.** Gilded Bangle, **Numisma Collection by Aulerth**, *₹9,000; aulerth.in* **6.** Jumpsuit in Hemp, **Antaratma**, *₹8,300; antaratma.in* **7.** Luna Short Dress, **Buna**, *₹9,800; bunastudio.com* **8.** Moonlight Co-ord Set, **Khara Kapas**, *₹10,500; kharakapas.com* **9.** Poached Sling, **Cord**, *₹7,800; cordstudio.in* **10.** Birdie Mules, **Misfit Panda**, *₹3,550; misfitpanda.in*

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ELEVATED ECO-FASHION

Step up your style game while reducing your carbon footprint, with these fashion essentials. **BY RALAN KITHAN**

1. Space Dyed Handspun Handwoven Tencel Cotton Shirt, **Abraham & Thakore**, *₹6,900; abrahamandthakore.com* **2.** Rock Python Men's Bracelet, **FOReT**, *₹2,599; foretstore.com* **3.** Asymmetrical Knitted T-shirt, **Primal Gray**, *₹2,200; primalgray.com* **4.** Kalamkari Printed Shirt, **dash and dot**, *₹2,990; dashanddot.com* **5.** Polo Shirt (Coal Black), **WAKE YOUR DREAMS**, *₹7,000; wakeyourdreams.in* **6.** Bromma Sunglasses, **Sasha**, *₹7,990; sashawear.in* **7.** Cherry Blush Shirt, **Khara Kapas**; *₹5,400, kharakapas.com* **8.** Voyager Cork Travels Wallet, **Studio Beej**, *₹3,200; studiobeej.com* **9.** Crossover Utility Bag, **Cord**, *₹6,000; cordstudio.in* **10.** Wool Runners, **Solecraft**, *₹5,500; solecraft.in* **11.** Doctor Bag Leather, **Nappa Dori**, *₹13,500; nappadori.com*

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CONSCIOUS CHRONOMETERS

Watchmakers are taking steps to reduce their environmental impact by employing recycled materials and eco-friendly designs. Here are five timepieces that showcase sustainable watchmaking.

BY RALAN KITHAN

Patravi Scubatec Black Manta Special Edition

CARL F. BUCHERER

The Carl F. Bucherer Patravi Scubatec Black Manta Special Edition watch features a rubber strap with a recycled PET textile layer, perfect for diving enthusiasts. With a diameter of 44.6mm, automatic helium valve, and water resistance of 500m. *₹8,04,384*

CARL F. BUCHERER
ScubaTec
28
50
40
30
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Baume 10637

BAUME & MERCIER

The Baume 10637 features a 12 o'clock crown and black PVD steel horns that have an interchangeable strap system with a button. The blue lacquered dial boasts a distinctive moon phase disc and comes with a blue cotton strap. *₹80,000*

BREITLING
1884
SuperOcean
CHRONOMETER

Superocean Heritage '57 Outerknown Limited Edition

BREITLING

Breitling's Superocean Heritage '57 Outerknown watch pays homage to the 1957 SuperOcean, and the surfing lifestyle of the 1960s. Its ECONYL® yarn single-piece strap repurposes nylon waste from the oceans. With oversized indices, a COSC-certified chronometer, and a diameter of 42mm, this timepiece is limited to 500 pieces. *₹4,73,000*

PANERAI
SUBMERSIBLE
28
eSteel

Submersible QuarantaQuattro ESteel™ Blu Profondo

PANERAI

The watch features a case made of 95 per cent recycled steel and a bracelet crafted from recycled PET to reduce its environmental impact. With automatic mechanical movement, 171 components, and a three-day power reserve, this watch is a sustainable marvel. *Price on request*

Diver 42 mm

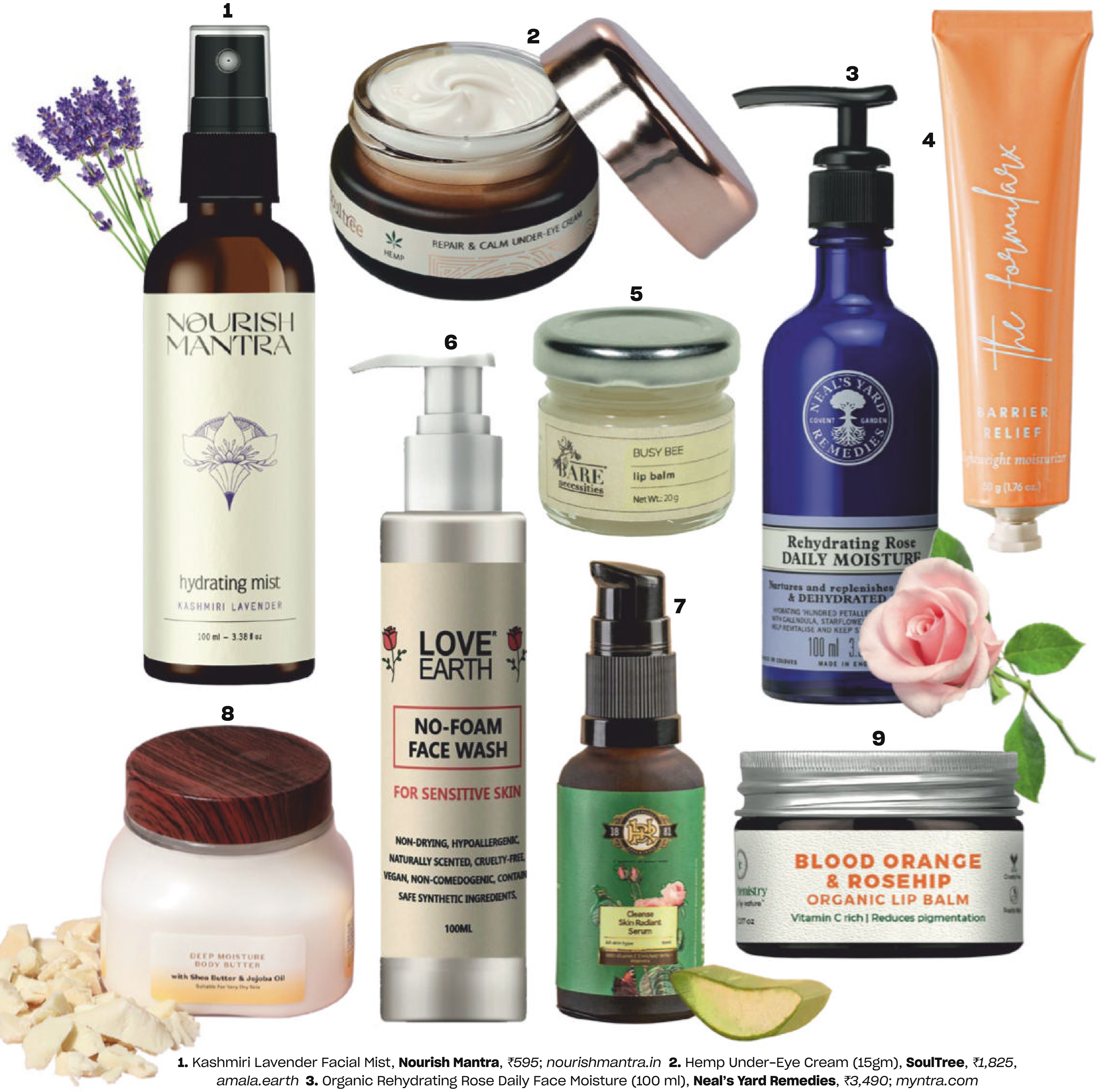
ULYSSE NARDIN

Ulysse Nardin's Diver 42 mm is a beautiful watch with a stainless-steel case and sapphire glass. The watch comes with a self-winding mechanism, 42mm diameter, and a strap made from recycled fishing nets. £6,010 *(₹6,19,188)*

ULYSSE NARDIN
47°03'36.2"N
06°45'12.8"E

NATURALLY NURTURED

Revitalise your skin this summer season with these eco-conscious products. **BY RALAN KITHAN**


1
NOURISH MANTRA
hydrating mist
KASHMIRI LAVENDER
100 ml – 3.38 fl oz
2
REPAIR & CALM UNDER-EYE CREAM
HEMP
3
NEAL'S YARD REMEDIES
COVENT GARDEN
Rehydrating Rose DAILY MOISTURE
4
the formularx
BARRIER RELIEF
lightweight moisturizer
50 g (1.76 oz.)
5
BARE necessities
BUSY BEE
lip balm
Net Wt.: 20g
6
LOVE EARTH
NO-FOAM FACE WASH
FOR SENSITIVE SKIN
NON-DRYING, HYPOALLERGENIC, NATURALLY SCENTED, CRUELTY-FREE, VEGAN, NON-COMEDOGENIC
SAFE SYNTHETIC INGREDIENTS
100ML
7
18 81
Cleanse Skin Radiant Serum
8
DEEP MOISTURE BODY BUTTER
with Shea Butter & Jojoba Oil
9
BLOOD ORANGE & ROSEHIP
ORGANIC LIP BALM
Vitamin C rich | Reduces pigmentation

1. Kashmiri Lavender Facial Mist, **Nourish Mantra**, *₹595*; *nourishmantra.in* **2.** Hemp Under-Eye Cream (15gm), **SoulTree**, *₹1,825*, *amala.earth* **3.** Organic Rehydrating Rose Daily Face Moisture (100 ml), **Neal's Yard Remedies**, *₹3,490*; *myntra.com* **4.** Barrier Relief Lightweight Gel-cream Moisturizer (50gm), **The FormulaRX**, *₹699*; *kindlife.in* **5.** Busy Bee Lip Balm, **Bare Necessities**, *₹250*; *barenecessities.in* **6.** No Foam Face Wash (100ml), **Love Earth**, *₹399*; *kindlife.in* **7.** Cleanse Skin Radiant Serum For Face Glow (30ml), **Cleanse**, *₹899*; *cleanseayurveda.com* **8.** Deep Moisture Body Butter (160 ml), **Pure Sense**, *₹650*; *puresense.co.in* **9.** Blood Orange & Rosehip Lip Balm (5gm), **Juicy Chemistry**, *₹350*; *kindlife.in*

The couple strikes a pose at Smoke & Mirrors, the cigar Lounge at SLS Dubai.

ON HIM: Suit, **SDS By Kushal Shah**; shoes**, Trumpet Shoes**; all prices on request.

ON HER: Suit, **Rocky Star**; jewellery**, Urban Thesaurus**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin;** all prices on request.

Through Thick & Thin

Just like most of us, Indian regional cinema and Bollywood's beloved couple—**Genelia and Riteish Deshmukh**—keeps returning to Dubai for its endless offerings. On one such visit, the duo takes **BAYAR JAIN** behind the scenes of their real-life holidays and reveals why Dubai is the ultimate destination for family getaways.

Produced by **BAYAR JAIN & ISHIKA LAUL**
Photography by **TARUN KHIWAL**
Assisted by **ABHISHEK VERMA** and **HUSSAM NAWABZADA**
Styled by **PRANAY JAITLY & SHOUNAK AMONKAR (WHO WORE WHAT WHEN)**
Assisted by **SHUBHAM JAWANJAL** and **CHAITANYA BALWANT**
For Genelia
Hair and Makeup by **AUDREY SANGMA**
For Riteish
Hair by **ARSALAN SHAIKH**
Makeup by **NITIN PANDURANG INDULKAR**
Location: **DUBAI**

I'm on my third trip to Dubai.

The global holiday destination has served up diverse and unique backdrops for many *Travel+Leisure India & South Asia* cover shoots. And this time, I'm in the company of the Indian movie industry and social media's favourite family, the Deshmukhs, our cover stars for June.

"It's always good fun to be in Dubai. There's always something new happening here," says Riteish as we prepare for the first shot at AYA Universe, the city's latest multimedia experience theme park that opened to the public on December 17, 2022. "The same day as my birthday," Riteish beams as he takes in the hypnotic light projections and tranquil music. His partner Genelia stands alongside, sporting her signature smile.

Located within Wafi Mall, the massive 40,000 square-foot AYA Universe (*aya-universe.com*) promises an otherworldly experience in each of the 12 rooms. The ethereal journey starts at The Source, where a six-minute light show comes with a touch reactive dome and projections that pulsate with music. At Celestia, light beams are activated by touch, and a 12-minute show takes you through icy interstellar rings. The magic continues at The Falls, where a real waterfall runs upside down. For the first frame, however, we park ourselves at Harmonia, an infinite mirror room that puts on a light show that dances in robotic symphony.

As the red, green, white, and yellow lights flicker, I slip into a hypnotic trance. The fusion of art and technology has never looked so engaging. On cue, Genelia says, "Riteish introduced me to art; he's really into it. Ever since he took us to a museum on our honeymoon, I've fallen in love with art, too! Today, when we vacation with our sons (Riaan and Rahyl), we make it a point to visit museums." I can't help but wonder whether this is an interest they picked up from their architect-turned-actor dad.

"Both are like him!" sulks the kids' Aai. Baba cheekily adds, "But both like me!" Despite the playful banter, the two work as a team. Riteish explains, "Even if we both disagree with something, we talk about it amongst ourselves and not in front of the kids." In true team spirit, Genelia adds, "Yes. We give each other the space to be parents."

AYA Universe promises an otherworldly experience in each of its 12 rooms.

Riteish stands tall amidst the hypnotic light projections at Tides, a mirror-lined hall at AYA Universe.

ON HIM: Suit, **Amaare**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin**; all prices on request.

The couple poses for a shot at Harmonia, an infinite mirror room at AYA Universe.

ON HIM: Suit, **Rohit Gandhi + Rahul Khanna**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin**; all prices on request.

ON HER: Dress, **Ambika Lal**; jewellery, **JOOLRY**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin;** all prices on request.

The River in AYA Universe features touch-reactive lights. Below: Walk through illuminated gardens at Flora, one of the 12 rooms at AYA Universe.

Riteish looks dapper against the illuminated moons at Luna, AYA Universe.

ON HIM: Suit, **Rohit Gandhi + Rahul Khanna**; watch, **Jaipur Watch Company**; shoes, **Christian Louboutin**; all prices on request.

Genelia is all smiles at SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences.

ON HER: Outfit, **Shivani Awasthy**; jewellery, **Urban Thesaurus**; all prices on request.

GETTING THERE

Emirates (*emirates.com*) offers multiple direct flights to Dubai from all the major cities in India.

STAY

Located in Dubai's Downtown district, the 75-storeyed **SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences** boasts expansive views of the Dubai creek as well as uninterrupted visuals of Burj Khalifa. Indoors, 254 hotel rooms, 321 hotel apartments, multiple signature culinary concepts, and more await. *Doubles from ₹28,050 per night; book.ennismore.com*

Paramount Hotel Dubai celebrates Hollywood-style living in the heart of Dubai's Business Bay district. When here, find Hollywood-themed rooms, Californian-inspired cuisine, and unequivocal entertainment. *Doubles from ₹11,220 per night; paramounthotelsdubai.com*

I'm equal parts touched and awed by this camaraderie. I watch as the two lovebirds exchange sweet nothings between every shot. He lends his shoulders as she steps off her high heels. She waits patiently during his solo shots. How do they achieve a work-life balance since both of them have a packed schedule, I ask. "We're both extremely clear on giving our kids time. While we want them to know that we go to work and life is not a party, we also make it a point to spend time with them as soon as work ends," says Genelia, as we move towards SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences—the team's home during the trip—for the second leg of the shoot. Here, comfort and luxury take over.

Located in the Downtown district, the 75-storey tower promises 360° views of the city and plenty of family-friendly offerings. While the two infinity pools of the roof command incomparable city views, 254 expertly designed hotel rooms and 321 hotel apartments promise opulence. The dining options including the contemporary steakhouse Carna by Dario Cecchini; sultry cigar lounge Smoke & Mirrors; lobby-level mixology lounge S Bar; Los Angeles-inspired cafe EllaMia; rooftop nightlife venue Privilege; and the Italian restaurant Fi'lia run by women.

Is the city girl in Genelia excited by all these options, I am curious. "Riteish would always say that he's had a great upbringing in Latur [a village in Maharashtra]. Being a city girl, I never understood this. Today, I'm glad that I can give my kids an upbringing like his—one that is a mix of city and village life, both," she says, adding, "It's important to understand the competitive world of the city while also being one with nature." No wonder then that the couple hopes to take their children to North East India or Kenya's iconic Maasai Mara for the next family vacation.

"Vacations, however, can get very tiring. These children have so much energy that at times, we need a holiday after a holiday!" jokes an exhausted father. In Dubai, however, these fast-paced adventures can be tweaked to suit all ages. You can slow down at Dubai Creek with a ride on a traditional ferry boat known as *abra*; groove and glide across the Olympic-sized ice-skating rink in Dubai Mall; make a splash at the Aquaventure Waterpark; enjoy friendly tee offs at Topgolf Dubai; and more—the choice is never-ending! Riteish sums it up well, "Dubai is special since you always have a fun time, whether you come alone, with your wife, or kids. It's a great family destination!"

As we pack up the shoot, I watch the parents take a breather in the magnificent lobby on the 71st floor of SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences. Moments later, two boys rush out of the lift with their grandparents in tow. "Baba, look! We bought these new shoes at Dubai Mall," the younger one squeals. And just like that, the two tired parents get recharged to take on the world again. +

Rooms in SLS Dubai sports lilac and violet tones. Above: The property has 75 storeys. Below: Fi'lia, on the 70th floor, is a Michelin Bib Gourmand award-winning restaurant.

Sky-high Luxury

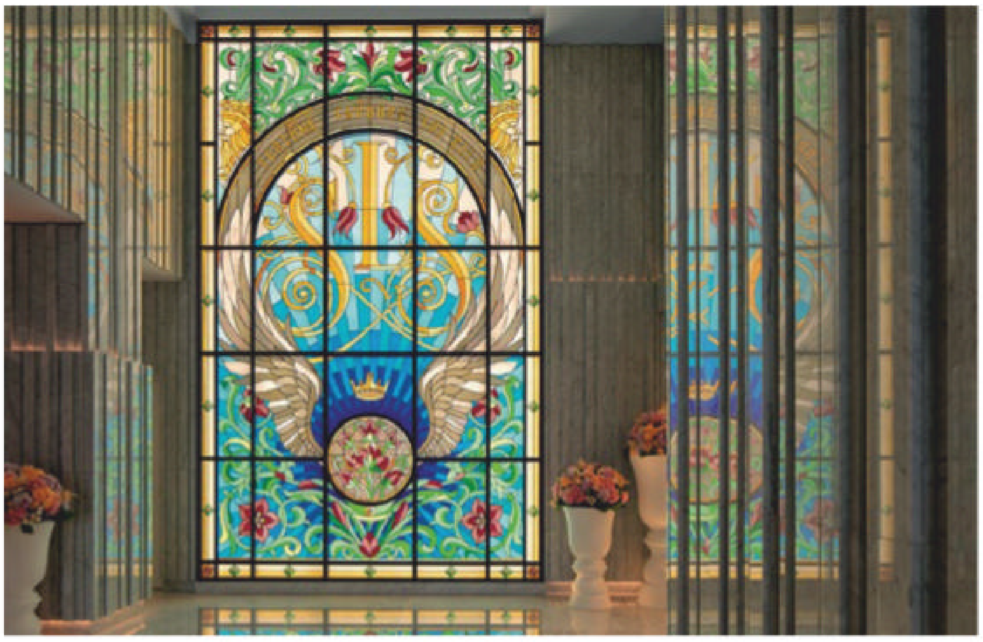
Take family vacations to the next level with SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences, a 75-storeyed royal abode where glamour meets comfort. **BAYAR JAIN**

STANDING MAJESTICALLY in the Downtown district, SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences promises unobstructed 360° views of the city's skylines—including the iconic Burj Khalifa and Dubai Creek. Add to this the brand's signature hospitality and unmatched glamour, and you get an excellent holiday destination. Opulence begins from the get-go here. At the entrance, a large stained-glass window with the Latin phrase meaning 'Fortune favours the bold' gives guests a glimpse into the historic charm that resides within the 75-storeyed building. The atrium on the 71st floor exudes similar artistic vibes, courtesy of the playful statues and paintings that are illuminated by light filtering through majestic floor-to-ceiling windows. The 254 rooms, 321 hotel apartments, and 371 residential units bring this aesthetic to life with contemporary art, sleek accents, and exceptional fittings signature to the brand's DNA.

Created by architect Aedes and completed by interior designer Paul Bishop, each hotel room here is decorated in lilac and violet tones that are accentuated by rose-gold motifs. Every category—Signature Rooms, Sky Rooms, or Suites—has spacious terraces or balconies. Throughout the day, gaze at the azure blues of Dubai Creek, and watch Burj Khalifa twinkle post sundown. End with a bath made better with Ciel Bath amenities.

When it comes to hotel apartments and residential spaces, assurance of added privacy is the highlight. Available in one or two bedrooms created in a simplex or duplex form, these secluded stay options are fully equipped to cater to long-term guests and families. These soundproof apartments also boast of German technology aluminum facades and window systems that are thermally insulated.

The residences, on the other hand, range from studio apartments to two-bedroom duplexes. Think spacious living areas done up in grey and purple with rose gold touches, state-of-the-art kitchens featuring stone or marble countertops, wooden



Clockwise from here: A large stained-glass window greets guests at the entrance of the hotel; EllaMia serves coffee along with macarons, cakes, and pastries; the Presidential Suite is well-suited for family vacations.

COURTESY OF SLS DUBAI HOTEL & RESIDENCES

cabinets complete with high-end appliances, and double-height ceilings.

The dining spaces at SLS Dubai Hotel & Residences too, promise similar royal treatment. Head to Fi'ilia, a Michelin Bib Gourmand award-winning restaurant, for local artisanal food, handcrafted cocktails, and a culturally immersive experience. A restaurant run by women, it serves Italian and Mediterranean meals for lunch, aperitivo, and dinner, in the company of mesmerising views from the 70th floor and the option of dining on the garden terrace with al fresco seating.

At Carna by Dario Cecchini, located on the 74th floor, immerse yourself in a contemporary steakhouse experience helmed by the legendary butcher, Dario Cecchini, who hails from Panzano in the Chianti region of Tuscany. Sip on wine straight from the cellar, enjoy the large collection of whiskeys at the dedicated bar, and premium cuts at the private dining rooms. Continue this love for mixology at S Bar. Located in the Sky Lobby, this eclectically chic bar boasts an impressive cocktail programme, and light and gluttonous meals.

EllaMia is a sophisticated cafe that brings the Los Angeles-based coffee culture to Dubai. For a sultry vibe, head to the speakeasy-style Smoke & Mirrors. A lounge hidden from the public eye, this space blends style with divine food and great music. The jaw-dropping feature, however, sits at the hotel's rooftop: Privilege. Recognised as the world's highest overflow pool, this stunning venue features two infinity pools where one can enjoy signature cocktails, light fare, and the sun.

Further indulgences await at Ciel Spa. Considered the epitome of luxury, it houses seven treatment rooms, and dedicated male and female thermal rooms—including steam rooms, experience showers, plunge pools, and relaxation rooms. Those looking for makeovers can trust the experts at the grooming salon for services such as LED facials, Legology Signature Leg Contouring, and more. A fully equipped gym, two outdoor terraces, and IV Drip Therapies complete the wellness offerings here.

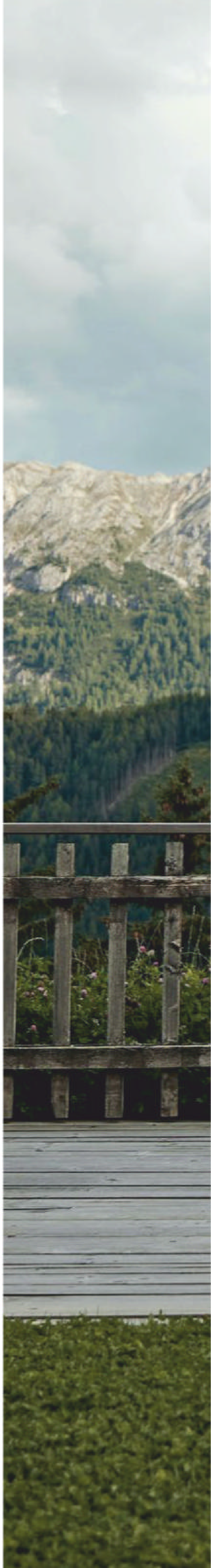
To make the most of these wellness offerings, SLS Dubai has introduced a Summer Spacation offer. Available till the end of September, guests can book a room for two, spend the night in one of the hotel's luxurious rooms, and wake up to a sumptuous breakfast overlooking the expansive city skyline. Ciel Spa will also treat luxury seekers to a rejuvenating 60-minute massage or an LED mask facial. Throughout their stay, guests will also have access to the hotel's first-class facilities, including the state-of-the-art gym, spa and sky-high pool, all at ₹31,470). *book.ennismore.com*

TRAVEL+
LEISURE
INDIA

THE CONSCIOUS LIST

In an era where ethical tourism is shaping the future of travel, we invite you to discover a world where luxury meets sustainability, where every step you take conributes to a better tomorrow. Here's a list of 50 immersive experiences, extraordinary hotels, and inspiring personalities that will empower you to travel responsibly and make a positive impact on the planet.

BY TEAM T+L & SHIBANI BAWA



COURTESY OF FORESTIS, ITALY

MARK GREEN/ALAMY

Sleep in the Sky in Urubamba

PERU

This is a bucket list worthy experience. Spending a night in the first-ever hanging lodge in the world is equal parts exciting, thrilling, and memorable. The Skylodge Sacred Valley has three transparent pods hanging from the side of a cliff face at an altitude of 370 metres. Ideal for eight guests, each pod comes equipped with a bedroom, dining area, and private bathroom with eco-toilet and sink. It's not for the faint-hearted though, the pods can only be reached by a ladder climb from the valley floor, or via a hike and zip line, though no climbing experience is needed. Once on top, you get to enjoy the unmatched 300° view of the majestic Sacred Valley. Checkout is equally exciting; an adrenaline-filled descent down a three-circuit zip line takes you all the way down to your driver. *setours.com*

Embrace Slow Fashion in Bangkok

THAILAND

Love shopping in Thailand? Next time, check out some local brands that have a sustainable business model, and minimise your carbon footprint. Folkcharm Studio is a handloom and sustainable Thai brand. Folkcharm (*folkcharm.com*) partners with natural cotton farmers, artisanal communities, and local craftswomen—everything is made with hand-spun yarn, incorporating the handloom process and local techniques of natural dyeing. Mae Teeta (*Maeteeta.net*) is a brand that pays tribute to its owners' matriarch, Mae Teeta, who revolutionised the traditional indigo dyeing technique in Thailand. This label uses locally harvested cotton and harnesses the natural colouring properties of plants like ebony and mango. Taktai (*taktaibrand.com*) is another Thai fashion label whose products not only look great, but also feel amazing against your skin as they use their own original unique bamboo fibre combined with cotton and rayon.

Live like a Local in Delhi

Visiting a city as a tourist and experiencing it like a local are vastly different. The latter is fully immersive, leading you to places and experiences that are not written about in guidebooks. India Untravelled offers an opportunity to stay with a local family in a traditional Delhi neighbourhood. Your host introduces you to a side of the city that is not often talked about. Expect to hike in the Aravallis that are home to hidden lakes, enjoy the cuisine of Tibetan people, and traverse the lanes of East Delhi that are home to obscure crafts. After a whirlwind tour of the city, immerse yourself in a pottery workshop, enjoy *qawwali* on a non-busy evening at Nizamuddin Dargah, and get a taste of a city that is a melting pot of cultures and cuisines. *indiauntravelled.com*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF FOLK CHARM; SHUTTERSTOCK

Spot Elusive Wildlife in Spiti Valley

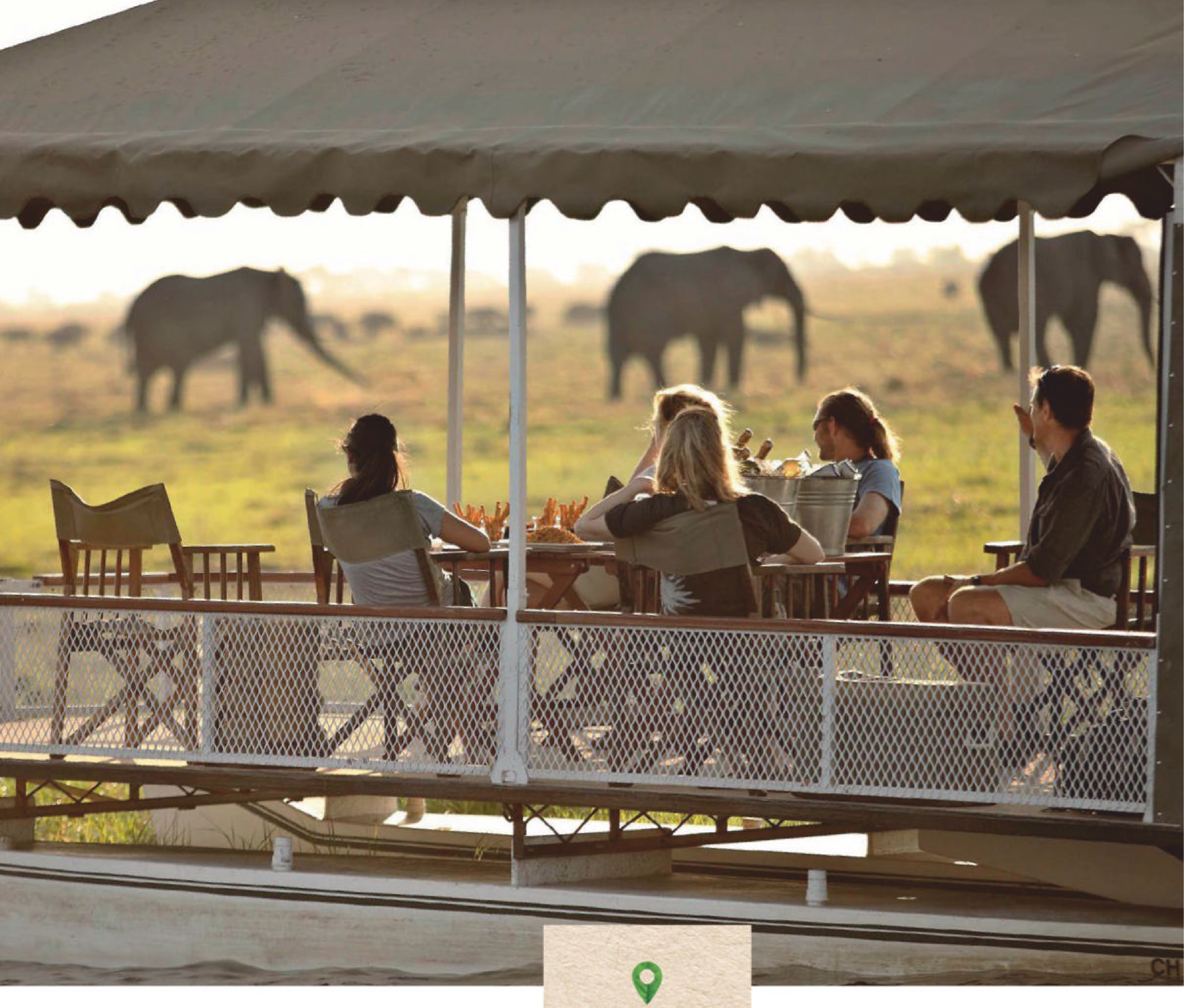
HIMACHAL PRADESH

Perched at approximately 4,419 metres, Chicham is one of Spiti's highest villages. This remote land has a population of approximately 400 locals. Located inside Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary, the village is a haven for snow leopards. The area is becoming increasingly popular amongst wildlife photographers, who reach here to get a glimpse of the elusive cat. Being totally rural, accommodation options in this region are typically homestays. This means getting an opportunity to live like a local in mud homes, share their meals, and possibly even exchange stories. *treksandtrails.org*

Stargaze at a Dark Sky Reserve in New Zealand

On the shores of Lake Pukaki in New Zealand lies one of the world's best dark sky reserves. As there are no man-made lights or passing airplanes to interrupt your view, this location is a stargazers' dream. You can marvel at a mind-blowing glow of billions of stars, shooting stars, satellites, planets, constellations, the Milky Way as well as other galaxies. On a clear evening, you'll be able to see craters on the moon, rings of Saturn and/or Jupiter, and up to four moons orbiting Jupiter using a powerful telescope. Lakestone Lodge that relies totally on solar power offers a range of self-sufficient living options and low impact excursions such as biking and stargazing. The Lodge also harvests rain and bore water and has a sewage treatment facility too. *lakestonelodge.co.nz*

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF LAKESTONE LODGE



COURTESY OF WILDERNESS DESTINATIONS

Uplift a Community in Botswana

At Wilderness Vumbura Plains camp in Botswana, uplifting local communities and conservation go hand in hand. Located in the Okavango Delta, the camp offers 14 spacious rooms (including two family rooms) split into two separate clusters of seven each. This eco-friendly retreat is nestled in the 90,000-hectare private Kwedi Concession in the northern Okavango Delta, bordering the Moremi Wildlife Reserve. Guests can volunteer at Children in the Wilderness (CITW), a non-profit organisation that facilitates sustainable conservation through leadership development and education of children in Africa. It is imperative to teach the rural children of Africa to understand the importance of conservation and its relevance in their lives, for these places to continue to exist. From hosting Eco-Club programmes at local schools to running camps at ecotourism company Wilderness Safaris, you can teach and empower children in many ways. *wildernessdestinations.com*

Sample Feni in Goa

The traditional alcoholic drink of the sunshine state is coming into its own. The Floating Feni experience at Goa's (actually world's) only *feni* cellar of Fazenda Cazulo is not to be missed. Designed like some of the best international wine-tastings at vineyards, the entire experience is for about two hours, which includes a peek into the craft of making *feni*, its history, and finally, tasting it. You sit at a table with your feet immersed in river water, tasting different varieties of *feni* and tucking into local food that pairs well with the drink. *urbanaut.in*

Cycle through Utrecht

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands has a huge cycling culture with more than 35,000 km of cycle paths all over the country. Exploring various landscapes while riding a bike, with wind in your hair, is one of the best forms of responsible travel. The Dutch city of Utrecht has been recognised and awarded as one of the top places in the world to cycle. A bike tour through this historic city is suited for varying abilities, making it ideal for a multi-generational holiday. You can cycle along hot spots like the Lombok neighbourhood, Central Museum, Vredenburg, and the historic centre. Along the route you will also be treated to a glimpse of some of the hidden parts of the city that tourists usually don't get to see. *bajabikes.eu*

Set off on a Sea Kayaking Adventure in Croatia

Beyond the red rooftops of Dubrovnik, Croatia also has a beautiful coastline with secret beaches and the bluest waters that you've ever seen. One of the best places for sea kayaking in Croatia is Pakleni Islands, a chain of rocky islets off the coast of Hvar. A half-day tour includes time to chill, snorkel, and even find your private little cove. In short, this needn't be a rigorous workout, you can simply sit on your kayak and go with the flow, taking in the beauty of the Adriatic Sea. Sign up with AndAdventure, and rest assured that all guides are intimately aware of their surroundings and are trained to provide each traveller with suggestions on how to minimise the negative impact on the environment and marine ecosystems. *andadventure.com*

SHUTTERSTOCK (2)

Slow Travel through Cambodia

Cambodia is the land of temples and forests. It is not meant to be rushed through with a to-see list. A three-day tour with Buffalo Trails is ideal to visit the South Gate of Angkor Thom, the ancient royal city of Khmer Empire, and walk through forest trails where you can feel the presence of tall trees, wildflowers, butterflies, and forest birds. Travel back in time with your guide at the Terrace of the Elephants, which served as a platform from where the king could welcome back his victorious army, and the Terrace of the Leper King that winds along a narrow passage that leads to the Baphuon complex. Enjoy sunrise views along with a picnic breakfast in front of the Angkor Wat Temple. Take your time to stroll through the intricately carved hallways that are lined with hundreds of fine carvings, discover small shrines, and take in the spectacular colours of the sunset at Pre Rup Temple. *buffalotrails-cambodia.com*

cookery school

FROM TOP: DENNIS K. JOHNSON/ALAMY; COURTESY OF COOKERY SCHOOL

Learn Baking in London

If you marvel at all the lovely patisseries during your holiday in London, this one's for you. You can sign up for The Ultimate Baking Course at the Cookery School and continue to get the finest of cakes, pastry, breads, macarons, and meringue even when you get back home! We recommend the four-day intensive baking course even if you're a beginner. This course takes you through the fundamental baking principles and techniques and leaves you with plenty of tips and tricks to assist you in future baking adventures. An added pro is that the Sustainable Restaurant Association has given the Cookery School the highest possible score for its consistent approach towards sustainable practices. *cookeryschool.co.uk*

Bike through Himachal Pradesh

Beat the crowds at the predictable tourist hotspots in Himachal Pradesh, and explore the Himalayas on your motorcycle. Discover scenic roads, quaint Himalayan villages, and get to know the people and their cultures—the mountains hold many opportunities to go off the beaten path. The thrill of the motorcycle coupled with cool breeze caressing your face is unmatched. Take your pick from a choice of camps, homestays, or guesthouses to hang your boots at the end of each day. Every tour is customised and you can make it as adventurous or as relaxing as you like. If you want to make it even more eco-friendly, you can opt for a mountain bike and ride through paths that are inaccessible for motorcycles. *himalayanecotourism.com*

Go Horseback Riding in Slovenia

Slovenia has horse riding trails measuring a total length of more than 412 kilometres. Various companies specialise in equestrian experiences ranging from day trips through the countryside to longer holidays stretching up to four, five, or even eight days. On horseback, you can explore beautiful parts that are usually inaccessible—ride along plateaus, discover ancient caves and castles, and cross scenic forests. You can choose from various trails to suit your interest—visit the Kočevje region and then descend to Kostel Castle or climb to the top of Gorjanci Hills from the hills of Bela Krajina, and descend past the meadows to Pleterje and its hot springs. The best part: there are tours for beginners as well. *visitdolenjska.eu*

FROM LEFT: BHAVEN JANI/ALAMY; IAN MIDDLETON/ALAMY

Become a Green Activist in Auroville

TAMIL NADU

Sustainable and eco-friendly living are almost a part of life at Auroville. Auroville began as an experimental community that promotes sustainable living practices like the use of renewable energy, waste management, and organic farming. These practices, however, are not limited to just the residents. Visitors can also participate by volunteering in community projects, attending workshops on sustainable living, and exploring the community's sustainable infrastructure. Even if you're not living in the area, you can still be part of this initiative by registering online and learning as well as spreading the word about the preservation of nature. *atmasanga.com*

FROM TOP: MELTING SPOT/ALAMY; COURTESY OF JAMTARA WILDERNESS CAMP

Sleep Under the Stars at Jamtara Wilderness Camp

MADHYA PRADESH

Jamtara Wilderness Camp maintains a fine balance between luxury and behaving responsibly towards its immediate environment. Combining the two, Jamtara has launched a revenue-sharing model with a villager wherein guests can experience what villagers have access to daily—sleeping under the stars. The experience involves sleeping in the fields with stars overhead, surrounded by the sounds of the jungle. Since villagers are incentivised with money, they also benefit from keeping the local wildlife alive and are more eager to participate in rewilding initiatives. *jamtarawilderness.com*

Soak in the Biodiversity of Manipur

Loktak Lake is considered a lifeline for the people inhabiting its surrounding areas in Manipur. Home to various species of birds and a rich aquatic life, the lake is the primary source of livelihood for fishermen who navigate around the hundreds of floating islands locally known as *phumdis*. Among Loktak's many *phumdis* is Keibul Lamjao National Park, the world's only floating national park. Keibul Lamjao National Park is especially important as it is the last natural refuge of the critically endangered Sangai deer, Manipur's state animal. An unmatched way to experience this haven is by staying at a homestay on one of the *phumdis*. Built like traditional straw huts, the homestays offer added perks of going on daily boat rides with your fisherman host and enjoying home-cooked Manipuri food. *manipurtourism.gov.in*

Volunteer at the Dolphin Discovery Centre in Bunbury

AUSTRALIA

Located in the quaint coastal town of Bunbury, the Dolphin Discovery Centre is a not-for-profit organisation that allows you to get up close with dolphins, learn more about them, and even swim with them. Its commitment to conservation, education, tourism, and research of the local population of wild bottlenose dolphins make it a great place for volunteer work. Having a conversational level of English language is mandatory since this is a people-related activity. You can even be asked to be a tour guide for visitors to the centre. Since it takes time for the volunteers to become familiar with the centre, you'll need to commit to a minimum of 25 hours per week for six weeks. Once you sign up, you'll be thrilled to spend your time in the beautiful town, both on and off the coast. During your free time, visit the farmer's market close by. *dolphindiscovery.com.au*

SHUTTERSTOCK (2)

Sign Up for a Heritage Water Walk in Rajasthan

Water is a valuable resource, especially in the middle of a desert. And interestingly, it is the people in the desert who have learnt how to maximise water through ancient wisdom and scientific knowledge. Heritage Water Walks in Jaipur is designed to showcase the rich cultural heritage of Rajasthan and specifically how it helps in water conservation. Covering topics like history, architecture and engineering, local traditions and beliefs, and even politics, Heritage Water Walks unravels some ancient and modern ways in which this valuable resource is preserved and conserved in Jaipur. Born out of a passion project, it brings to the fore gems that may have been in clear sight but remain hidden due to our lack of awareness. *heritagewaterwalks.com*

Explore the Lesser-known Flavours of Assam

Assam is home to different communities that are cocooned in an indigenous way of life. If you like exploring regions through their cuisine, an eight-day tour that deep dives into the flavours of Assam is just the one for you. Start your trip in Guwahati, make your way up to Kaziranga, and continue through Majuli, Sibsagar, and Dibrugarh. Along the way, relish the cuisine of four different ethnic communities of Assam, visit local village markets, and immerse yourself in the diversity of local ingredients. Even though the traditional cooking techniques in Assam include steaming, roasting, fermenting, and grilling, each community enjoys different flavours and dishes. However, the tour is not limited only to food, you will also see the most popular sites of Assam, both natural and man-made. This tour also includes a jeep and elephant safari through Kaziranga National Park as well as river rafting in Nameri. *kipepeo.in*

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; MATT HAHNEWALD PHOTOGRAPHY/ALAMY

Tour a Tribal Village in Arunachal Pradesh

Tribal tourism is an integral part of sustainable tourism. Arunachal Pradesh is home to 26 tribes and has 3,649 tribal villages. Most of the tribes have an inherently eco-friendly way of life. They have also recently opened their homes and hearths to let people get a glimpse of their lifestyle. Staying in a tribal home is definitely one of the finer ways to experience the natural beauty of this land. Dulcimer Tours conducts tribal tours with 10-day itineraries that give you a complete feel of the varying landscape as well as tribal lifestyles. The tour starts in Guwahati and takes you into the heart of Arunachal Pradesh to Nyishi, Apatani, Hill Miri, Tagin, Galo, and Adi Gallong tribal villages. *dulcimertours.com* +

Pikaia Lodge

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

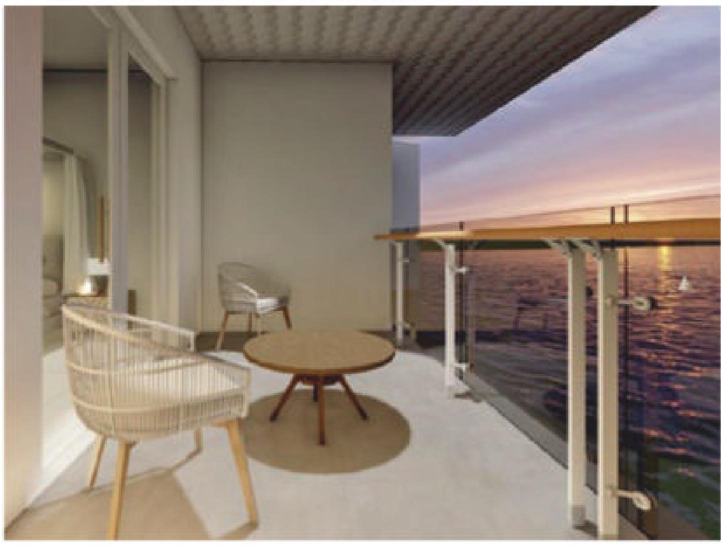
Located in one of the most ecologically diverse hotspots—Galapagos Islands—Pikaia Lodge offers an exclusive boutique experience in its 29 rooms. A Relais & Chateaux property, this contemporary luxury eco-lodge blends perfectly with the unique crater topography and was built using the lowest possible quantity of concrete. Instead, steel and natural Galapagos lava stone and tiles have been used on most floors and walls. As for most furniture, doors, and decor, sustainable, agro-cultivated teak and bamboo wood from the Ecuadorian mainland have been used. The property also tackles the problem of deforestation seriously. Not only were the endemic trees retained during the construction, but many were replanted to offset any carbon emissions. Pikaia Lodge's commitment to reforesting with native and endemic species has led to creating a favourable environment for the return of wild tortoises and birds to their natural habitat. *pikaialodge.com*

COURTESY OF PIKAIA LODGE

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF BHUTAN SPIRIT SANCTUARY; COURTESY OF MOSVOLD VILLA (2)

Bhutan Spirit Sanctuary

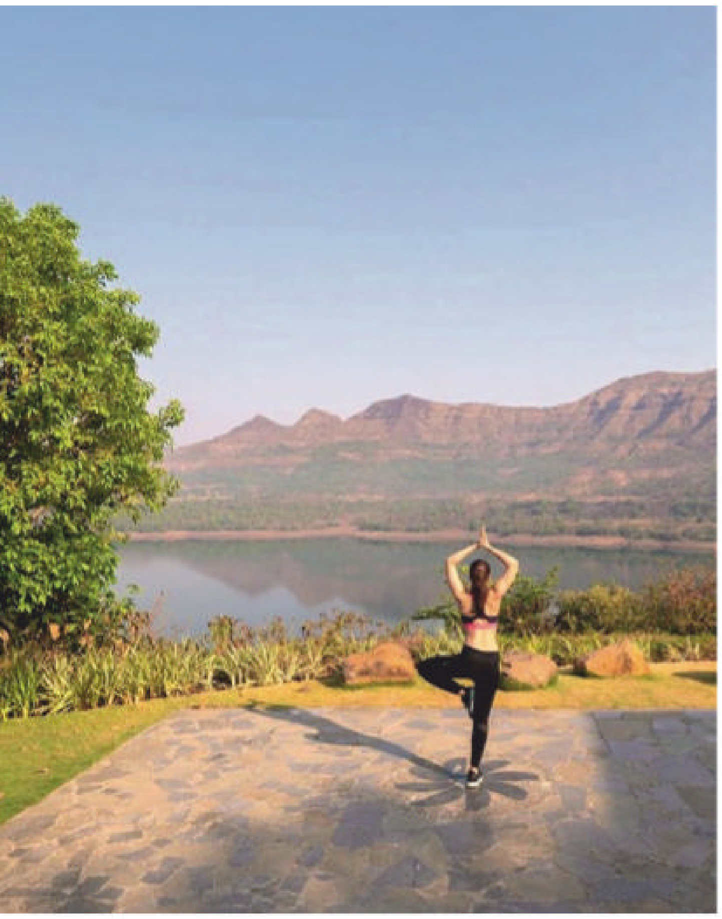
Offering guests an immersive experience of the local way of life, Bhutan Spirit Sanctuary is designed like a mountain fortress from a bygone era and is an ideal retreat to sign up for a bespoke wellbeing programme. Located high up in the Neyphu Valley, it is built in traditional *dzong* architectural style with all the rooms offering floor-to-ceiling windows and uninterrupted views of the valley. Following 'The Restful Mind' philosophy, the Sanctuary aims to create a lasting positive change in its guests' daily lives while living in harmony with the surrounding forests and farmland on the remote mountainside. The in-house traditional medicine doctors design a tailor-made programme for you following ancient techniques in meditation, mindfulness, and movement. During the course of your stay, you're also encouraged to meet the monks from Eutok Goenpa Monastery opposite the Sanctuary and share a meal with local farming families. *bhutanspiritsanctuary.com*



Mosvold Villa

SRI LANKA

Located in the coastal town of Ahangama in the Emerald Isle, Mosvold Villa promises an immersive, luxurious getaway. This beachfront villa has 16 rooms making it the largest villa in the area. The decor reflects fine Sri Lankan aesthetics, enhanced with an enviable display of antique furniture and gorgeous artwork, including batik panels by award-winning batik designer Sonali Dharmawardene. The specially commissioned batik panels and custom wall tapestries that line the entrance atrium of the property are handcrafted by Sri Lankan artisans. Additionally, the bedspreads and pillow covers found in Mosvold Villa have also been designed by this team of batik artisans. Although batik originated in Indonesia, the Dutch introduced it to Sri Lanka, and over the years it has evolved as a unique form of textile art in Sri Lanka. *mosvoldhotels.com*



Atmantan Wellness Centre

MAHARASHTRA

Synonymous with wellness, Atmantan Wellness Centre near Pune offers a transformative and educational experience. The wellness programmes here are thus custom made with prescribed nutrition, healing therapies, and functional fitness programmes. Their commitment to sustainability includes green buildings and nature preservation through the use of passive architectural techniques, renewable energy, and solar insulation. The property has also earned the recognition of a Gold LEED Certified Project (LEED is a green building certification programme that recognises best-in-class building strategies and practices). Atmantan also follows the practice of vermiculture, where all the wet kitchen garbage is being used to create vermicompost; plants soil and climate-appropriate flora; and has one of the largest solar hot water installations for a resort in the country; as well as a Solid Immobilized Bio-Filter (SIBF) system that uses treated chemical free water for all landscaping requirements. *atmantan.com*

Desa Hay

BALI

Desa Hay, a serene escape for conscious travellers, has been built sensitively, keeping in mind the verdant surroundings as well as respecting local customs. Located amidst the lush forests of southern Bali, 40 per cent of the resort's land has purposefully been left as a green space and the rest has been landscaped using native Balinese plants. Local artisans have created all the artwork at the resort and Indonesia-inspired architectural details can be found everywhere, from the North

FROM EXTREME LEFT: COURTESY OF ATMANTAN WELLNESS CENTRE; COURTESY OF DESA HAY; COURTESY OF LCHANG NANG RETREAT

Sumatran-style villa roofs to the traditional Javanese *joglo* restaurant. Abstaining from all single-use plastic, this solar powered resort provides bamboo combs and toothbrushes, and biodegradable slippers made from coconut husks to all their guests. Desa Hay exclusively recruits Indonesian staff and attempts to further support the local community by hiring local guides and drivers to offer cultural and spiritual activities as well as Balinese cooking classes. *desahay.com*

Lchang Nang Retreat

LADAKH

Lchang Nang Retreat translates to 'the house of trees'. Located in Ladakh's beautiful Nubra Valley, this eco-conscious luxury hotel offers 17 individual cottages built in the local architectural style using mud, stone, and poplar wood. Being the first traditionally built hotel in the region, it revived old techniques of housing, and gave immense confidence and pride to the locals in that a luxury project can be undertaken using completely local techniques and skills. Villagers are routinely given a tour of the property to showcase the environment-friendly initiatives undertaken, and even encouraged to adopt sustainable practices. The resort channelises melting glacier water to irrigate their lands, supports local artisans by promoting their paintings and organising exhibitions, and provides local culinary experiences through their menu. Since Lchang Nang Retreat is operational for only six months in a year—this means that all the staff also had only seasonal employment—the management has tied up with properties in other parts of India to share resources. *lchangnang.com*

Ladakhi Kitchen
Tea Station

Raffles Udaipur is a serene sanctuary on the banks of Udai Sagar Lake, whose sustainable practices are a part of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For starters, the boats that ferry guests to and from Raffles Lakeshore use zero carbon emission batteries. The hotel's food and beverage programme also incorporates responsible practices, like having a closed loop that generates as little waste as possible, using a large quantity of local and seasonal produce, and abstaining from offering buffets to avoid food wastage. Additionally, the hotel's organic waste converter supports responsible consumption and production by converting recyclable waste to manure that is then used in the hotel's lawns. The in-house water bottling plant further reduces use of plastic bottles and produces sustainable, high-quality bottled water on-site. *all.accor.com*

Raffles Udaipur

RAJASTHAN

The Malabar House,

KERALA

The Malabar House, a Relais & Chateaux property in Kerala's Fort Kochi, offers a luxurious stay, a holistic Ayurvedic centre for mind-body wellness, and an opportunity to explore Kerala's backwaters on the hotel's own eco-friendly house boat. Following their ethos to incorporate local architectural and design elements, the 16 rooms are done in a traditional style with stone floors and no rugs, and some of the rooms have double-poster beds made from reclaimed pillars. It also boasts a carefully curated collection of art. Art and heritage preservation is the main focus here as well as the effort to preserve and promote regional culinary culture. To this effect, The Malabar House supports farms to grow *pokkali*, a hyperlocal variety of rice. *malabarhouse.com*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE MALABAR HOUSE; COURTESY OF RAFFLES UDAIPUR

The Oberoi Udaivilas

RAJASTHAN

Designed as a traditional Indian palace by the banks of Lake Pichola, The Oberoi Udaivilas recreates the romance of the past with its reflecting pools, verdant gardens, and sprawling courtyards. And at the heart of all this lies a genuine commitment to sustainability. All the boats that are used to ferry guests across Lake Pichola are solar operated, the one megawatt solar plant covers 60 per cent load of the property on an average, motion sensors are installed in areas to save energy, waste water is treated by STP and further used for irrigation of landscaped area, and an OWC machine is used for recycling wet waste. Additionally, incandescent and CFL lighting has been converted to LED, flow restrictor has been fixed in guest rooms for water saving, and there is a bottling plant on site as well, making this hotel a perfect choice for exploring the city while ensuring sustainability. *oberoihotels.com*

Domaine des Etangs,

FRANCE

Domaine des Etangs is an idyllic country retreat in Massignac. Its history dates back to the 13th century, hence during the recent renovation interior designers, local craftsmen, and carpenters were hired especially for their ancestral expertise to respect the castle's history. Apart from top-notch wellness programmes, there are guided nature walks with a forest ranger, as well as visits to the beehives with the gardener. Within the estate, 100 per cent electric bicycles and cars are provided to guests with two charging stations to explore the 1000-hectare grounds. Local tree species have been planted thoughtfully to keep the environment as authentic as possible and there is also a certified organic vegetable garden. *aubergeresorts.com/domainedesetangs*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE OBEROI UDAIVILAS; COURTESY OF DOMAINE DES ETANGS

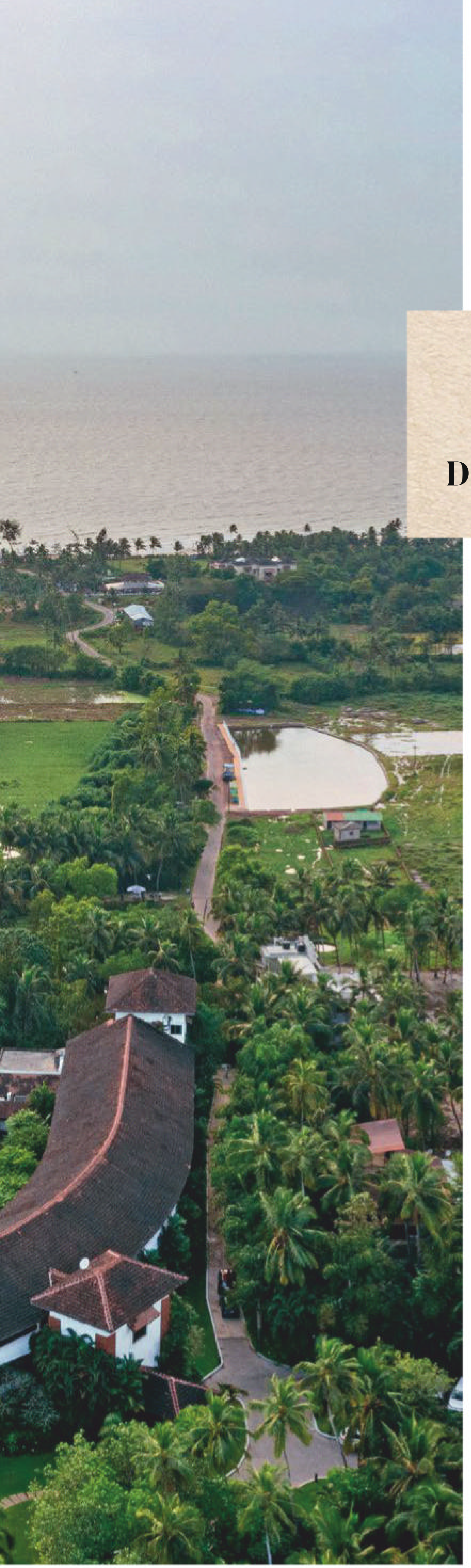
TISHYA
TISHYA
Kumud & Nilgiri
LOTION
TISHYA
Kumud & Nilgiri
HAND WASH

The Leela Palace Bengaluru

KARNATAKA

While the Leela Hotels have always laid great emphasis on sustainability, their efforts towards the same have accelerated post the pandemic. The Leela Palace Bengaluru, drawing inspiration from the Vijayanagara Empire, is a new age palace that operates on 86 per cent of renewable energy. The brand also offers assurance of safety with 'Suraksha by The Leela' and has launched a signature fragrance, Tishya by The Leela. Inspired by the national flower of India, *kumud* or lotus, and the wonder flower, *neelakurinji* that blossoms only once in 12 years, the fragrance can be found in the complete range of bath amenities exclusively crafted for the brand. These amenities are 100 per cent vegan, paraben, and SLS-free, developed with natural formulations using pure essential oils and natural, floral fragrances. To top it all, there is also planet conscious and completely recyclable packaging. Since the launch of Aujasya, the in-house water bottling plant, the property has also done away with plastic water bottles. *theleela.com*

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF THE LEELA; COURTESY OF ALILA DIWA GOA; COURTESY OF TIGER MOUNTAIN POKHARA LODGE



Alila Diwa Goa

Alila Diwa Goa takes great pride in minimising its environmental impact and supporting the local community. Notable efforts have been made to preserve indigenous ecosystems—the team has tried to maintain the natural landscape and spaces have been created to highlight centuries-old trees within the property. High-pitched roofs, wide verandahs, and tranquil courtyards are inspired by the local architecture of the region and created with local materials including red laterite stone and teak. Alila Diwa Goa was the first hotel in Goa that installed a water bottling plant, thus eliminating a whopping 3,50,000 single-use plastic bottles annually. In order to reduce food waste, the property launched a Zero Food Waste programme wherein all dry and wet food waste is collected and recycled to create fruit candy, poultry, and fish feed, or organic fertiliser that is used in the Sky Garden. The Alila Solo initiative also respects and preserves indigenous people's way of life and traditions and aims to support the local community. *alilahotels.com*

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge

NEPAL

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is perched 305 metres above Pokhara Valley, on a ridge, against a spectacular Himalayan backdrop. Living up to the ethos of ecotourism, the lodge offers high-end regenerative tourism experiences in a rural mountain setting, away from the bustle of Nepal's cities. When here, expect immersive experiences far beyond a luxurious holiday. Think engagement with the local community and integration with the forest and mountain landscape. Besides being an ideal base for guests to enjoy the surrounding mountains pre and post-trek, travellers here are also encouraged to make a lasting impact in the local community through their Community Support Partnership Programme that supports Community Forest User Groups, local schools, health posts, local, national and international charities, environmental research and monitoring, and so on. *tigermountainpokhara.com*

Forestis

ITALY

Located amidst the thick forests in the Dolomites, Forestis is a boutique wellness hotel that runs on 100 per cent renewable energy, replacing outdoor artificial light sources with open fireplaces where possible. Honouring the forest area that it is nestled in, for every tree felled in the construction, two new trees were planted. Local wood has been repurposed into fencing and furniture, and wood heating and steam cleaning systems ensure that sustainability is practiced at every step at this luxury retreat. Originally built in 1912, the wooden façade of the historic building is under monumental protection, and the traditional South Tyrolean wooden ceilings and stairs have been carefully preserved. Extending sustainability beyond the estate, the hotel concierge encourages guests to use the Brixen Card, a free public transport pass throughout South Tyrol to visit nearby vineyards for wine tasting, artisanal markets to purchase local produce, and even museums and historical buildings. *forestis.it*

The Tamara Kodai

TAMIL NADU

The Tamara Kodai has a rich history that dates back to the 1840s. One of the first few houses to be built in the region, it was originally called Baynes Bungalow. Later, it was used as a rest house for the priests of Nagapattinam. All through the renovation of the property to its current luxurious avatar, existing materials such as wooden window frames and staircases were restored, reinforced, and reused. Based on the tenets of responsible hospitality, the brand's mission is to harmonise people and the planet while earning a profit. The Tamara Kodai's sustainability goals are aligned with the 17 UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development. Of the eight acres of property land, one and a half acres are reserved for flora. Some of the eco conscious and people-focused initiatives include 51 per cent local recruitment, gender equality via pay parity, and extensive water conservation. *thetamara.com*

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF FORESTIS; COURTESY OF THE TAMARA KODAI

STRAW BERRY

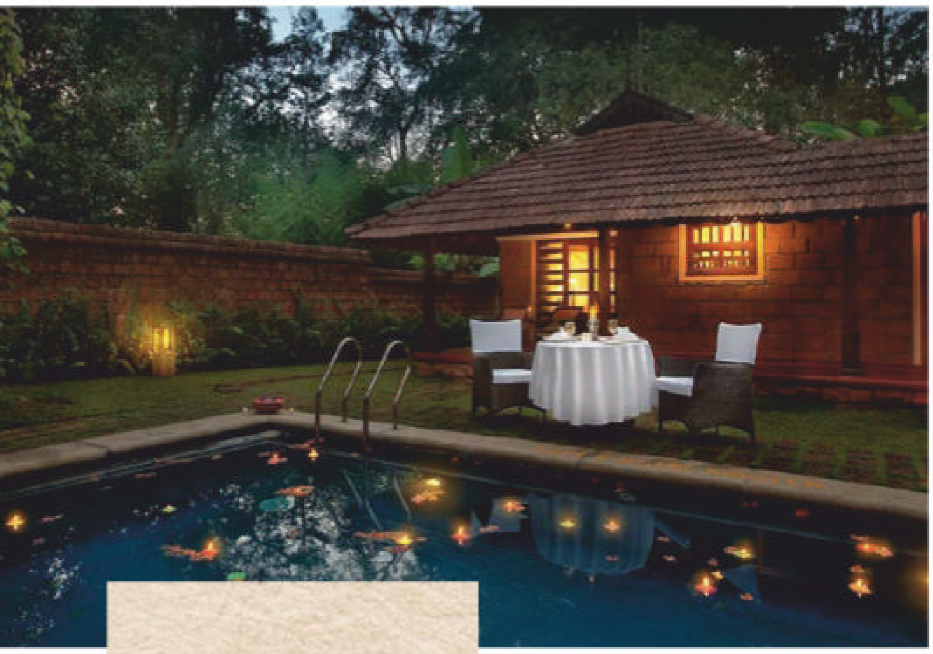
ITC Mughal
UTTAR PRADESH

Sustainability lies at the core of all operations at ITC Hotels, as the luxury hotel chain delivers its promise of providing 'Responsible Luxury'. ITC Mughal, located at a stone's throw from the Taj Mahal in Agra, recently became the first hotel globally to be awarded the LEED Zero Water Certification by USGBC meaning that a balance is maintained between total potable water consumption and total alternative or recycled water use. As part of its efforts to be self-sufficient, ITC Mughal has been following a sustainable process that ensures water requirements for its buildings and processes are met by capturing rainwater and treating it for appropriate consumption. The property also puts the planet first, and sustainable practices such as harnessing renewable energy, recycling and reusing water, recycling solid waste, and locally sourcing a sizeable proportion of ingredients are embedded in its daily operations. *itchotels.com*

Rann Riders by Kaafila
GUJARAT

Located in the great salt desert in western India, Rann Riders by Kaafila offers unique safaris to explore the salt flats, vast landscape, and culture of the region through customised wilderness trips. Going beyond the scope of regular safaris, Rann Riders includes talks by trained experts on understanding the biodiversity, geology, dining experiences amid the flats of the Rann. While water management and a recycling system to minimise water wastage is important to Rann Riders, working with the community holds equal significance. The team is involved in initiatives that benefit the local communities with high artisanal skills like weavers, embroiderers, and potters. These initiatives have helped in encouraging craftsmen to continue their ancestral skills profitably. *rannriders.com*

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF ITC MUGHAL; COURTESY OF RANN RIDERS BY KAAFILA



Evolve Back

KARNATAKA

Based on the tenets of responsible tourism, Evolve Back Resorts was established in 1994 with a dedicated mission of providing experiential holidays while preserving and showcasing nature and the culture of the land. Coorg, in Karnataka, is naturally blessed with year-long pleasant weather, forested hills, and spice and coffee plantations. Opening up the heart of Coorg for their guests, Evolve Back offers luxury villas built in plantation style as well as traditional Kodava style. For an immersive experience, guests can explore the quaint villages adjacent to the resort on an eco-friendly electric cycle accompanied by an in-house naturalist. A few of the responsible practices adopted by the resort include waste, water, and energy conservation initiatives, and educating guests while informing them of the measures that can be taken to reduce the human impact on the endangered environment. Additionally, local communities are also taken care of through direct employment at the resort. *evolveback.com*

COURTESY OF EVOLVE BACK (3)

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF ARCTIC BATH; COURTESY OF NAYARA TENTED CAMP

If we had to pick one hotel to enjoy the scenic Swedish Lapland, it has to be the dreamy Arctic Bath. Whilst it offers all the comforts of being indoors, the surrounding nature has been incorporated seamlessly into the cabins and suites. Built entirely with natural, sustainable materials, the Arctic Bath features glass walls, floating walkways, and sky-gazing decks that connect the interiors with spectacular outdoors. While the indoors sport a chic Scandinavian design created with wood, stone, and luxe textiles, the surroundings include frost-covered forests, and if you look closely, you'll even find tracks in the snow left by moose and reindeer. The entire retreat is run on 100 per cent renewable energy, with natural fireplaces filled with recycled pellets in the cabins and saunas. In the rooms you'll find locally made kicksleds, snowshoes, and hiking sticks. The restaurant also showcases hyperlocal ingredients that are sourced from the surrounding forest and farms. *arcticbath.se*

Arctic Bath
SWEDEN

Nayara Tented Camp
COSTA RICA

Nayara Tented Camp in Costa Rica is a luxury resort inspired by African safaris but adapted to a tropical Costa Rican rainforest. The tents, offering sustainable luxury, are propped up on stilts in order to leave a minimal footprint while maximising the stunning panoramic views of the surrounding rainforest and the volcano. Every tent is air-conditioned, fitted with a luxurious tub and a four-poster bed to lend it an indulgent, romantic feel. And it gets better with a private plunge pool, where water is fed from natural mineral hot springs. Located in the Arenal Volcano National Park, the property has been designed keeping in mind the space for wildlife and wilderness. An ambitious reforestation programme has further expanded the tropical rainforest providing safe habitats for sloths, monkeys, and butterflies. The camp also works actively on supporting the local community by providing employment at the property and various social initiatives. *nayaratentedcamp.com*

Dia Mirza

Actor

As the goodwill ambassador of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Wildlife Trust of India, Dia Mirza uses her voice and credibility to create awareness about conservation approaches and conscious lifestyle and promote responsible tourism. In a conversation with **CHIRAG MOHANTY SAMAL,** the actor-activist gets candid about the roadblocks on her way and life-altering experiences.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **Tarun Khiwal**
ASSISTED BY **Abhishek Verma**
STYLED BY **Theia Tekchandaney**
ASSISTED BY **Jia Chauhan**
HAIR AND MAKEUP BY **Shraddha Mishra**
ASSISTED BY **Surbhi Maheshwari**
LOCATION PARTNER **Fairmont Jaipur**

Maru Patch Tulle Dress, ₹68,950, **Shivan & Naresh;** Sapphire Draped Plunge Mailot, ₹19,950, **Shivan & Naresh;** earrings, price on request, **Moi;** Raffia Hat, ₹2,599, **Myaraa by Namrata Lodha; Green** Recycled Polyester Ankle Strap Sandals, ₹7,499, **Charles & Keith.**

What inspired you to adopt a sustainable lifestyle and how did you become interested in environmental protection?

I was raised in an environment where it was ingrained in our conscience that everything we use comes from the earth. And that it is our unsustainable practices that are causing climate change. And when I started working with organisations like Sanctuary Nature Foundation and Wildlife Trust of India, I realised that there was a big gap in conservation approaches. I felt I could use my voice to bridge this gap and take the work that was happening in silos to people. It started off by me getting more involved in the programmes that these organisations were running and working closely with the media.

Porcelain Print Skirt Set, ₹8,280 **Dash & Dot;** Chaand Katori Earrings with Pearls, **Anu Merton;** price on request.

When I was working on the TV series *Ganga–The Soul of India*, I saw plastic waste in a quantum that I'd never seen before, and just around that time, the Deonar dumping ground fire happened, and I started questioning our relationship with waste. That's when I started doing waste segregation at home. When you start adopting these practices, you want to share them because you want more people to follow.

As an ardent environmentalist, what bothers you the most?

The apathy and the complete disregard that government, policymakers, institutions, and industries have towards the fact that a lot must change quickly if we want to survive. And not just survive as a species but retain the health of the planet in a way where other species can survive as well.

How has motherhood changed you? Has it made you even more conscious of your choices?

I feel a lot more restless about creating change. I feel more despondent than I did before because I realise that we are raising our children in an environment that is possibly causing them a significant amount of suffering because of the quality of the air they breathe

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Favourite sustainable destination
Maasai Mara

Favourite sustainable restaurant
Tsas by Dholkar in Ladakh

▸ Wrap Dress, ₹24,800 **Payal Khandwala;** earrings, price on request, **Moi.**

or the quality of the soil their food is being grown in. And then there is the reality of climate change and the fact that in their lifetime, they would be experiencing extremely harsh conditions. But it's also made me more resolute to work towards change.

What are some of the biggest challenges that you face in promoting sustainability?
The hardest thing to change is human behaviour. I have realised that until policy gets implemented on the ground, nothing will change. Because at some point or the other, people will fall back into some form of lethargy or just disconnect unless it's a rule or a law.

What sustainable practices do you follow while travelling?
I take economy flights as much as possible, and that's something that people don't really think about—how your carbon footprint gets reduced when you fly budget airlines. I carry my own bottle and bag, so I don't create any waste. I think a sustainable way to travel is to be mindful of what you're consuming and how much waste you're creating, and being accountable for that waste. Another thing we can all do is make sure we carry our own amenities. So, at least you're not creating more trash with multiple small amenity cases.

Bodysuit, ₹43,000, **Saaksha & Kinni;** Palazzo, ₹15,000 **Saaksha & Kinni;** Harili Earrings, ₹3,500, **Anu Merton;** Paarijat Cuff, ₹17,000, **Anu Merton**; Pink Spiked Heels, ₹3,299, **The Cai Store**. ▾

What does slow travel mean to you?
The slow travel that I did for *Ganga–The Soul of India* was life altering. I got to travel through five states in India, and engage with the culture, people, and environment.

What was your favourite thing about Fairmont Jaipur?
I love the fact that they've replaced small amenity supplies in the rooms with large amenity refillable stations, which really helps. It's a beautiful property. It's rich in heritage. It's representative of Rajasthan's glory, yet it's modern.

Your most memorable trip till date.
It's my journey for *Ganga–The Soul of India*. No other travel has educated, informed, and made me feel more alive than that trip. Another journey that was incredible was the bike ride from Delhi to Ladakh that I did for my upcoming movie *Dhak Dhak*. What an empowering experience it was to ride in the Himalayas. The movie is a story of four women from entirely different socio-economic strata of life who choose to ride together from Delhi to Khardung La.

Ranison uses his Instagram account to educate people about responsible tourism.

Aakash Ranison

Climate Activist and Author

A nomad who promotes a minimalist lifestyle with his travel vlogs and writing, Aakash Ranison believes that simplicity is the key to conscious living. The activist talks to **SIMRRAN GILL** about keeping up with the nomadic life, his carbon-neutral book, and more.

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Two travel essentials
Camera and a black T-Shirt

One destination you keep going back to
Ladakh

It's been more than eight years since you've started living a nomadic life. How has your journey been?
The journey has been mind-blowing and life changing. I was just moving from one city to another because I was enjoying it. I first started cycling, then walking, and eventually hitchhiking. Now, I'm a person with a positive perspective and am open to challenges. This journey has been a blessing.

The path that you've set out on is a challenging one. How do you keep up?
I really enjoy what I'm doing. Being happy, travelling, enjoying the whole universe, creating art, and communicating on behalf of nature is the purpose of my life; that's how I see it, so it's not challenging.

Do you also budget your travels? What factors do you keep in mind while budgeting?
I budget my life–and for me my life and my travel are not two different things. I live a super minimalistic lifestyle, with just two bags. One is a backpack with all my devices, and the other is a small trolley bag with six pairs of my clothes. I'm also vegan, and not a fancy one. So, my expenses in general are very minimal.

Your new book, *I'm A Climate Activist*, released recently. Can you tell us more about that?
The idea is very simple, I don't want to fight with anyone when it comes to climate change. It is a problem, and the solution is sustainability. My book is all about action and there are 10 chapters and each chapter [talks about] one industry–like food and beverage, plastic, etc. In each chapter, there is a small narrative that comes from my personal journey of living a sustainable life. There are 45 well-known personalities who've also contributed to my book. More importantly, the book has been printed on environment-friendly paper, using vegetable ink. A 100 per cent of the royalty is going to a charity that I started last year–Greener Earth Foundation. The money will be used to offset the carbon emissions generated by the book, thereby making it India's first carbon-neutral book.

What is the first step towards becoming a conscious traveller?
If you really are a traveller, then you'll be a conscious person automatically. It's about choosing whether you are a tourist or a traveller. A tourist manipulates the place by putting the money and comfort first, but a traveller puts the experience first and absorbs the place, and that's how you become sustainable.

COURTESY OF AAKASH RANISON

COURTESY OF SONEVA

Sonu Shivdasani

Founder and CEO, Soneva

By launching Soneva Fushi in 1995, Sonu Shivdasani began the trend of back-to-nature luxury holidays. His vision and commitment to sustainability and luxury redefined tourism in the Maldives, making it a premier destination promoting slow life. He tells **CHIRAG MOHANTY SAMAL** about his journey so far and the challenges faced along the way.

Tell us about your journey to the Maldives.
I first visited the Maldives with Eva (his wife) in 1987 and fell in love with the place. There was pure ice coloured water and aqua marine lagoons with little blobs of sand scattered as far as the eye could see. We kept returning. However, at one point we realised that we needed to become more involved as the resorts that existed [on the island] were poor on both sustainability and standards of service and quality. We opened Soneva Fushi in 1995 to redefine luxury hospitality with a purpose of environmental sustainability.

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Soneva's core philosophy
We have pledged to protect the biodiversity and habitats on and around our resorts

What does slow life mean to you?
Sustainable. Local. Organic. Wholesome. Learning. Inspiring. Fun. Experiences.

What were the challenges you faced in creating a sustainable resort in the middle of an island?
We faced challenges to get funding for the construction. One of the reasons for this was that we refused to build hundreds of rooms and aim for the low-end mass market, which was the norm in the Maldives at that time. We opted to build a limited number of villas—42 initially—despite being situated on one of the largest islands in the Maldives. Additionally, we built a spa, which was also unusual at that time. It took four years to raise the funding and construct the resort. Our focus on low volume, high quality, and high-end clientele was a conscious decision. What attracted us to the Maldives was its natural beauty and we knew that to preserve that, one needed to limit the number of people coming.

Tell us about the sustainable practices that came about over time.
Soneva Namoona, which we launched in 2019, aims to solve a problem that has bedevilled the Maldives for a generation—how to properly dispose waste. With Soneva Namoona, our aim is to create a blueprint for empowered zero-waste communities in the Maldives, centred around the three core components of 'Reduce, Recycle and Inspire', and grounded in the reality of the challenges and opportunities that are unique to local islands. In February 2020, we celebrated another first in the Maldives—Maalhos became the first island in the country to end the practice of burning its garbage in open bonfires. This was made possible by the opening of the island's Eco Centro Waste-to-Wealth centre, funded by Soneva. It is a waste-processing facility that sorts the waste into different types such as plastic, glass, tin, and wood. It compacts, crushes, and chips it where possible, and sends it off the island for recycling.

What's the road ahead for you?
Our new resort that opens at the end of the year will run 95 per cent on renewables. Soneva Fushi and Soneva Jani will be at a little over 50 per cent. Certainly by 2030, all three resorts will be decarbonising in their operations even though we have been carbon neutral as an organisation since 2010. +

Akshita Bhanj Deo, Mrinalika Bhanj Deo

Directors, The Belgadia Palace

Princesses Akshita and Mrinalika Bhanj Deo of the Bhanja dynasty of Mayurbhanj, Odisha created a buzz in the travel industry when they restored their 200-year-old palace and opened it to the world. Today, The Belgadia Palace stands as a powerful symbol of their vision and dedication to preserving heritage. The social entrepreneurs talk to **PALLAVI PHUKAN** about their journey.

What inspired you both to pursue a career in the hospitality industry?

Mrinalika: Our family has always been entrepreneurial and promoted social enterprise in Mayurbhanj. Belgadia was restored keeping in mind that travel can be a means to sustainable development and that homes can be seen as a platform with social impact as the core ethos.

Akshita: Mayurbhanj has such an illustrious history and contributed so much to make the fabric of the nation richer that we decided we could reconceptualise the idea of a palace. It was a way to engage with local communities, promote conservation, and continue culinary traditions for a new age audience.

In what ways do you incorporate sustainability practices into the daily operations of The Belgadia Palace?

M: The Belgadia Palace is dedicated to preserving local flora through edible landscaping and restoring indigenous and

COURTESY OF AKSHITA BHANJ DEO AND MRINALIKA BHANJ DEO

exotic plant species. We prioritise waste segregation, energy efficiency with Energy Star appliances and LED lighting, and sustainable water management. Our property utilises sustainable building materials and promotes the use of refillable dispensers and eco-friendly products. We engage in nutrition farming and composting. We support local artisans through artist residencies and prioritise hiring and upskilling youth from the community. Additionally, we partner with sustainable brands for our boutique store, providing market linkages and free marketing.

How do you curate a mindful experience for guests during their stay at The Belgadia Palace?
A: A percentage of the funds generated from room bookings and dining experiences directly support non-profit organisations focussed on education, health, sports, arts and architecture, and conservation. As we are a state prone to natural disasters, we work on making sure we stick to guidelines on energy savings and water savings, and have calculated our carbon footprint to monitor ways we can reduce that year on year. The key ingredients of our cuisine are millets and local spices, and we have tied up with the Odisha Millet Mission to procure millets. We also promote dying crafts like Dokra and the folk martial arts tradition of Mayurbhanj Chhau, which is on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.
M: We offer tailor-made experiences focussed on heritage, arts, culture, culinary delights, wildlife, and rural tourism. Our experiences involve interacting with locals, shopping in local markets, cooking and eating together, and engaging in activities like paddy field sowing and learning *adivasi* tunes. With over 20 distinct *adivasi* tribes in Mayurbhanj and a staff at Belgadia that represents 15 of these tribes, we provide an immersive, earthy, and conscious approach to tourism.

Are you involved in any initiatives to revive and promote the lost art and culture of your region, in addition to restoring your family palace?
M: Yes. We have built an in-house boutique store which houses handlooms and handicrafts of the district that day visitors and guests can buy as well as learn about the craft. We have a fifth generation Dokra artist who comes every evening to meet guests and speak about his art form. Guests can purchase wares from him or place orders directly for commissioned work. We are also launching an artist's retreat later in the year for creative minds to come and explore the region's rich art and culture. Last year, Mehrangarh Fort Trust and Musuem [officials] came down to Mayurbhanj to do a restoration report and train select members of our staff to understand restoration and importance of heritage conservation.

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; BISWARUP GANGULY/ALAMY

▲
Leh Ladakh is the duo's favourite eco-friendly destination.
Below: Guests can buy artworks from a fifth generation Dokra artist.

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Favourite environmental author:
Shalini Devi Holkar for Cooking of the Maharajas The Royal Recipes of India and Almond Eyes, Lotus Feet: Indian Traditions in Beauty and Health

Favourite eco-friendly destination
Pondicherry and Leh, Ladakh

The Belgadia Palace has put Mayurbhanj on the world tourist map. How do you ensure that this recognition translates into sustainable livelihood opportunities for the local community?
M: A percentage of funds generated from visits to The Belgadia Palace is dedicated to our philanthropic arm, the Mayurbhanj Foundation. This enables us to support and invest sustainably in local non-profits focussed on healthcare, sports, arts and culture, conservation, and education.
A: Last year, we conducted a digital literacy and entrepreneurship training in collaboration with Creative Dignity and Digital Entrepreneurship Foundation. The programme empowered 30 individuals in *sabai* grass weaving and Dokra and to market and scale up their businesses using online platforms and technology.

What are your plans for The Belgadia Palace?
M: To promote wellness and craft and expand the property with more keys, to have an in-house spa, be known for its yoga retreats and craft tourism, create craft clusters especially in and around Simlipal, where wildlife tourism will be the next big outdoors circuit. ✈

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Favourite environmentalists
Vandana Shiva, Bill McKibben, Rachel Carson, Naomi Klein, Michael Pollan, Ramachandra Guha, Arundhati Roy

Favourite eco-friendly destinations
Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Kerala

Bare Necessities relies on ethical sourcing from local farmers and vendors.

Sahar Mansoor

Founder, Bare Necessities

Even before launching Bare Necessities—a sustainable personal care, home care, and lifestyle products brand—Sahar Mansoor had embraced zero-waste living with open arms. In a conversation with **BAYAR JAIN**, the environmentalist busts the myths surrounding green businesses and challenges of running one.

Sustainable living is often perceived to be expensive or elitist. What are your thoughts on this?
At Bare Necessities, we rely on high quality ingredients that are locally and ethically sourced. So, production costs are steep. As awareness for such products increases, the demand will also increase, which will offset the cost for production, resulting in economies of scale.

That being said, sustainability need not be as expensive an affair as it is touted to be. Switching to a menstrual cup instead of using single use sanitary napkins and tampons, for example, can help save over ₹2 lakhs. Plus, menstrual cups can be responsibly disposed with no negative impact on the planet. One can actively choose to repair things at home, which will help reduce irrelevant purchases.

What do you think is the role of businesses and industries in mitigating climate change?
Running a business based on the triple bottom line—people, planet, and profit—should be the new way to rethink businesses. This is a holistic approach for running a business and maintaining balance, while providing stability and sustainability.

What were some of the biggest hurdles you faced while adopting a green lifestyle?
I started taking my first steps in April 2015. When I ran out of soap, I learnt how to make my own instead of using store bought ones. In my zero-waste journey, I realised we lived in a world with landfill destined products. In response to the problem, not only did I find some solutions for myself, but I also wanted to create a company that mirrored the values of zero waste, ethical consumption, and sustainability. However, I am still not zero waste, and I doubt I will ever be.

What is your advice for those who want to adopt a zero-waste lifestyle?
Adopting a zero-waste lifestyle is a journey. Every small step towards reducing waste and creating a sustainable future counts. Evaluating your waste, reducing single use plastic, composting, repairing and reusing items, and most importantly, educating yourself can be powerful.

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF SAHAR MANSOOR; COURTESY OF BARE NECESSITIES

Aneeth Arora

Founder and Designer, Péro

Since its inception, Aneeth Arora's label Péro has brought a fresh perspective to Indian crafts, infusing it with a contemporary sensibility. The creative designer talks to **RALAN KITHAN** about the label's latest collection, its approach to sustainability, and more.

What is the inspiration behind your recent Spring/Summer 2023 collection Forget Me, Forget Me Not?
The inspiration for the collection was the daisy and forget-me-not flowers. Initially, I was drawn to these flowers because of their colours. The daisies are yellow and white, while forget-me-nots are blue, and these two hues complement each other splendidly. However, it was their stories and anecdotes that tied them together and inspired the collection. Both flowers, in their unique ways, symbolise love and romance.

How would you describe your journey?
My journey has been a continuous learning experience. Over the past 13 years, I have made many mistakes and learned from them. The evolution of the brand has been tremendous—from the techniques we used to what we incorporate now. However, our core ethics and philosophy of creating handmade and heirloom pieces have remained the same. We aim to make unique pieces that people will cherish and never want to discard, with the goal of reducing waste and preventing pieces from ending up in landfills.

Your collections often feature a mix of traditional Indian textiles and contemporary design elements. How do you ensure that these elements complement each other?
Even though we work extensively with handloom and handcrafted techniques of India, our aim is to create a product that is globally appealing. Therefore, when designing our clothing, we keep our wearer in mind. We understand that our wearer is not limited to India alone but is a universal traveller who feels comfortable whether they are walking the streets of Paris or Delhi.

Is there any destination that has made an impact on you?
Every remote part of India that I have travelled to, whether it's the villages of Gujarat or Rajasthan or South India, or even the Northeast India, has impacted me.

How do you integrate sustainability into your brand?
We've embodied sustainability in our brand quite subconsciously right from the beginning. This is simply because we've always derived our inspiration from traditional Indian practices, like that of reusing and recycling to ensure that nothing is discarded.

How do you ensure that the materials you use in your designs are eco-friendly?
We only use pure fabrics like cotton, linen, silk, and wool, and never use synthetic fabrics. We ensure that all the fabrics that are used are handmade and produced locally in India while also consciously inserting the age-old crafts like hand embroidery, hand crochet, hand knitting, ethical dyeing practices, and others. +

MINDFUL MENTIONS

An outfit you always carry on trips
Jeans, white shirt, and a T-shirt

Favourite sustainable destination
Chettinad, Tamil Nadu

The daisy and forget-me-not flower are the inspiration behind the designer's Spring/ Summer 2023 collection. Left: Arora ensures that the brand uses only pure fabrics.

FROM TOP: MINT/CONTRIBUTOR/GETTYIMAGES; COURTESY OF PÉRO (2)

Thomas Zacharias

Chef

Kerala-born Thomas Zacharias is many things—a chef, nomad, storyteller, and above all, a relentless advocate of local Indian food. In 2022, he decided to bring together all these passions, and founded The Locavore, a platform "committed to creating long-lasting impact through food". In a chat with **ROOPLEKHA DAS**, the chef-entrepreneur gets candid about his initiative, eating local, and the power of storytelling.

How would you describe your culinary philosophy and cooking style?
I'd describe myself as a chef who is rooted in tradition but also embraces growth through my culinary adventures. I love learning from my travels and allowing them to shape my ever-evolving style. It's important for me to be conscious and aware of how my decisions and my actions around cooking and food impact people, environment, and the wider ecosystem.

What is the story behind The Locavore?
The whole concept of The Locavore sprang from my travels. I've been exploring different parts of India for the past decade, mostly to gather ideas and inspiration for my menu. But along the way, something interesting started to happen. I began to notice the various challenges related to salaries and pay scales, especially for farmers. I also observed how many of our precious culinary traditions were fading away, and how people were moving away from local and regional ingredients. These issues became quite evident to me, and as a chef, I felt a bit helpless in making a positive impact all on my own. I realised that if I really wanted to make a difference, I needed to bring people together, create a collective movement. I alone could only do so much. And thus, the idea of The Locavore was born. It became my mission to unite individuals and organisations. During my travels, I discovered that there were many commendable efforts being made by farmers, sustainable producers, NGOs, and experts. The only problem was that these initiatives often worked in isolation, without receiving the attention and recognition they deserved. So, I decided to bring synergy to these endeavours through

COURTESY OF THOMAS ZACHARIAS

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: COURTESY OF THOMAS ZACHARIAS; SHUTTERSTOCK; COURTESY OF THOMAS ZACHARIAS

The Locavore. My aim was to make sustainability and consciousness more accessible and easier for everyday consumers. Sustainability is often seen as this daunting and complex concept, but it really doesn't have to be. By taking small steps, each of us can contribute to positive change. That's the message I wanted to convey. The Locavore's motto is #DoingGoodThroughFood. It's all about collectively bringing about a positive shift in the food system.

How did the Chef On The Road series impact your life?
I started Chef On The Road long before The Bombay Canteen existed. My first trip was in 2013, while the Bombay Canteen launched in 2015. I started doing COTR because I thought there was only so much I could learn through books and online reading, and I felt very disconnected from the food I was cooking. So I realised that travelling may be a good approach for me to immerse myself and keep learning. Additionally, once a chef reaches the top, there is no one to mentor them; they must teach themselves. However, travelling is one way that really opens up your mind and introduces you to new things. And, after 10 years of intensive travel, I've realised that the more you travel, the more you recognise how little you know. Most people would assume that after 10 years of travel, I know a lot. It's the exact opposite as I feel I know less than I did 10 years ago.

How do you incorporate sustainable practices into your travel routine?
I try and respect local traditions. I read about the local culture and history, as well as try understanding the food. I go with an open mind and curiosity and I accept with open arms whatever is offered to me. I'm a student, and I recognise and accept that I'm an outsider in someone else's world. As a result, I wish to leave as little of an imprint as possible.

MINDFUL MENTIONS

A restaurant that you keep going back to for its sustainable menu?
Shree Thaker Bhojanalay, Mumbai

One regional cuisine that you love
From Kerala, I love the *sadya*

You've been to a lot of places, what is that one local dish that you found the most fascinating and why?
It was something that was very basic—tea leaf pakora. Young and tender tea leaves can be used to make pakoras and it was very fascinating to me.

What's next on your travel bucket list?
In India, there are a few states I haven't been to—Manipur, Mizoram, Bihar, and Tripura. Abroad, it is Mexico and Vietnam. ✢

Clockwise from left: Tea leaf pakora is one local dish that Zacharias fell in love with during his travels; COTR crew at Tinsukia Haat in Assam; Mizoram is on the chef's wish list.

Jesmina Zeliang

Founder, Heirloom Naga

Jesmina Zeliang is the founder of Heirloom Naga, a brand that has been committed to preserving and promoting the traditional craft of loin loom weaving in Nagaland since 1993. The trailblazer talks to **RALAN KITHAN** about her journey and the significant impact her brand has had on the preservation of this indigenous craft.

What inspired you to start Heirloom Naga?
After completing my college, I returned home and tried several small businesses. However, none of them succeeded. During this time, I met a Zeliang Naga weaver who lived in my backyard and weaved traditional Zeliang Naga cloth on a loin loom on her veranda (at that time, weaving was primarily for producing shawls or *mekhalas* (wrap skirts). Out of curiosity, I asked her if she could weave something different. She said, "Why not?" I then asked her to weave a collection of black and white cushions incorporating the traditional motifs from the wrap skirts. This simple attempt to reimagine the existing textiles led to the birth of Heirloom Naga.

Heirloom Naga is deeply rooted in traditional artisanship. What is the process of working with the weavers?
I believe the weaver is the actual designer. They interpret my ideas and create the designs. Although many design elements can be employed on the loom, the idea is to ensure that not many hands are involved in the process. The three things that I always consider while designing are ensuring that the designs are not replicated by others, retaining the traditional yet contemporary language of the textiles, and making the weaving appear intricate while ensuring that selecting the motifs is not too cumbersome.

You have collaborated with several international brands. Tell us about taking Naga craft to a global platform.
The loin loom had not been showcased in the past to discerning customers outside our country. It has taken a lot of persistence to adapt to market trends while maintaining the essence and quality of our weaves. The international brands have given confidence to women weavers and people who want to support them and their cultural heritage. We have been able to convert our cultural wealth into commercial wealth, striking a balance between promotion and preservation. Our traditional working environment of weaving at home has become our USP, and people now value this kind of work environment.

What is the impact of Heirloom Naga on the rural landscape of Nagaland and how has it contributed to women empowerment?
Heirloom Naga honours indigenous women weavers, empowering them as they rely mostly on this work for income. By forming clusters of weavers and selecting leaders among them, we have been able to increase our footprint and upskill the weavers. We also teach the local community other crafts like [making] bamboo products to further empower them. Currently, we collaborate with around 55 to 60 clusters of weavers and are focussed on upskilling more weavers. My mission is to offer continuity of work, ensure that we train them and keep their looms busy, so they can earn a living.

What is your favourite travel memory?
My trip to Morocco was stunning particularly in terms of crafts. I was blown away by the riot of colours and craftsmanship. I was also impressed by my trip to Peru, where I saw many women wearing clothes woven on broader looms using natural dyes and a variety of colours. +

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Favourite Indian craft
Block printing

Favourite sustainable Indian brand
Injiri

COURTESY OF JESMINA ZELIANG

Abhimanyu Alsisar

Hotelier and Co-organiser, Magnetic Fields Festival

From hosting an EDM festival in a quaint Rajasthani village to being a sculptor and a documentary filmmaker, Abhimanyu Alsisar is doing it all. He talks to **SIMRRAN GILL** about his love for Alsisar and its people and his approach towards a clean festival.

Can you tell us about Alsisar Mahal and its restoration process?
Alsisar Mahal was originally built in 1630 and was captured by my ancestors in 1757 and has been in the family since. My father started the renovations in 1999; we finally finished in 2006, launched the hotel, and named it Alsisar Mahal. The restoration process was very tedious as it was a very old building and it was difficult to take out the bathrooms and rooms, because in olden days, not every room had a bathroom. The flooring was changed; there was a lot of work. Today, Alsisar Mahal has 43 rooms, two restaurants, a beautiful bar, and a smoking room. We also have a dungeon where we organise the jeep safaris. We also work on wildlife conservation to save the wildlife around our village.

How did the idea of hosting Magnetic Fields Festival at Alsisar Mahal come about?
The whole idea came to my mind when I was attending Jodhpur RIFF. The Maharaja of Jodhpur invited me for the *sharad purnima* dinner and that's where I met his friend, Mick Jagger. It was he who told me to start a music festival after hearing about the place from Bapji (the maharaja). And it's just not our festival, but the whole village's. Magnetic Fields has now turned into something so beautiful, and it all just happened organically.

Your effort towards a clean and sustainable Alsisar extend beyond the festival. What are some of the ways that you ensure this?
You should come to Alsisar to see how clean it is. After the festival, when my team works on managing the waste, they go door to door, meet people, and spread awareness. They also make reports at the end. And throughout the year, I have full support from the government. It's a small village, we have a panchayat committee, and the people here keep the village clean. We also try and get some money each year for the drainage system and have sorted the issue quite a lot. Every year, through Magnetic Fields, we do a lot of things for the village, like give equipment to the hospital or schools.

You are also involved in community building. Tell us a bit about this.
I was born as a patron and that's what I'm doing. My father was always very supportive of anything I started or wanted to do. And when I told him I wanted to patronise art, music, and culture, he let me do it. Two years after starting Magnetic Fields, I realised that my true love comes from our country's folk music–there is a lot of depth there. When I realised that my music festival can do something for our country's folk music, I went on a hunt and started finding folk musicians and instruments from all over Rajasthan and Gujarat. Magnetic Fields starts on Friday, 4:30 pm, and the first stage is that of [my NGO] Pukaar, and I host it personally. And we have folk musicians, who I handpick before the festival. Usually, I go and live with them in their village before they come to my house to play. ✢

MINDFUL MENTIONS

Favourite historical and cultural destination
Jaipur

Sustainable property on your bucket list
Chunda Shikar Oudi, Udaipur

Magnetic Fields is a three-day music festival that happens in Alsisar Mahal, Rajasthan.

FROM TOP: COURTESY OF ABHIMANYU ALSISAR; COURTESY OF MAGNETIC FIELDS FESTIVAL

Gopal Namjoshi

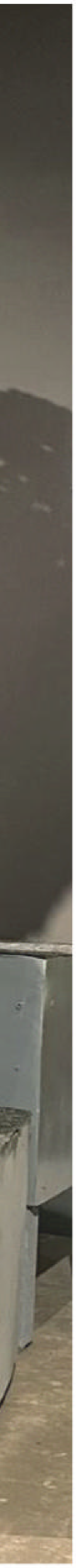
Artist and Installation Designer

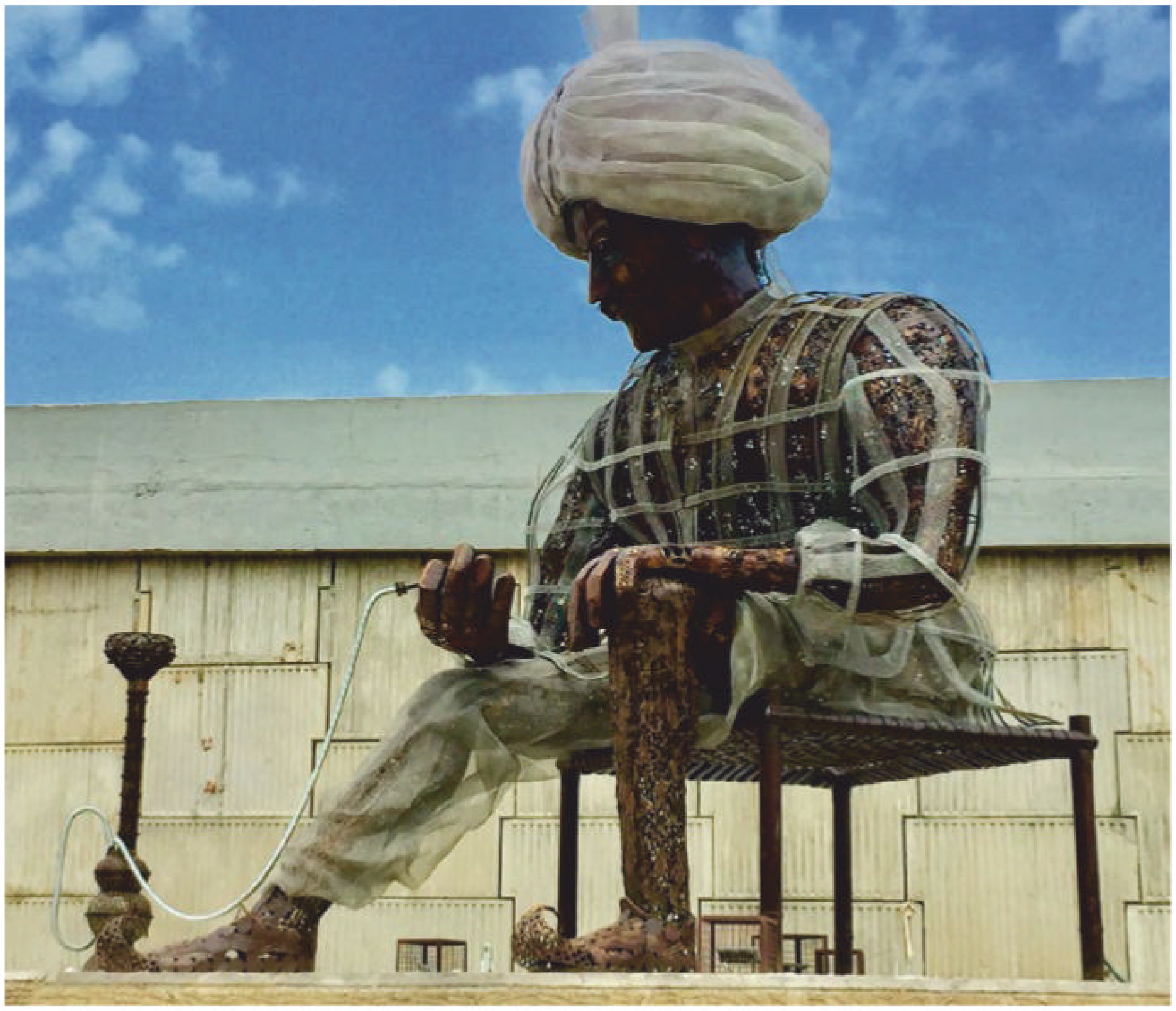
Armed with scrap metal, sculptor Gopal Namjoshi creates meaningful conversations around waste reduction and wildlife conservation among others. The artist with a purpose talks to **ADILA MATRA** about the process of turning waste into art and his take on conscious living.

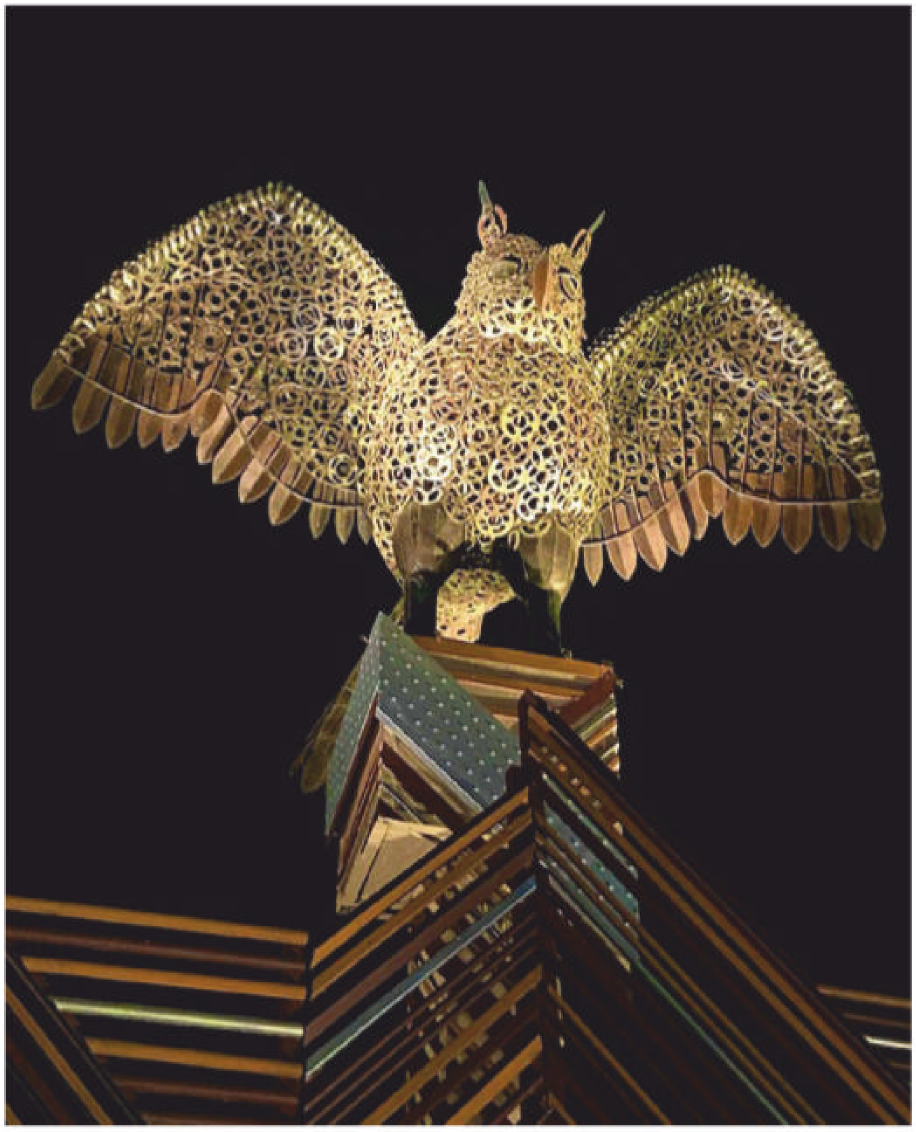
Your artwork incorporates scrap metal as a medium. What drew you to this material?
A day spent at a scooter mechanic's garage during my college years opened me to the world of welding and using found objects in metal for various artworks. Like any conscious Indian household, my mother would make maximum use of any material before trashing it to the bin. And that became a part of my consciousness while growing up. Metal, especially mild steel, offered a lot of possibilities for outdoor placement; it is available easily, requires less maintenance, and can be moulded easily.

What was the first sculpture you created using scrap metal? Which is your latest?
The first sculpture I made using metal was that of a cow in 2009, which led to a whole range of sculptures for The Gateway Resort - Damdama Lake. My latest one is a Pegasus (flying horse) created for a corporate tower in Saket, after the *Tau* installation at IFFCO Chowk in Gurugram.

What is your creative process when working with scrap?
Subjects like coexistence in nature and wildlife are very close to my heart. I see emotions and expressions in objects lying around in the scrapyard. I source my materials through various scrap dealers, industries, and auto repairing guys. I consider the thickness, weight, interesting forms, and purity of the material (plastic mixed with metal pollutes the environment). After researching a particular subject, I create sketches and make mental notes on the size, structure, and dimensions before translating it into 3D. I draw freehand on the ground to create a skeleton before giving it further shape and adding more to the form.







COURTESY OF GOPAL NAMJOSHI (3)

◂ *Clockwise from left:* Flight of Gurgaon *at MG Road, Gurugram depicts the Indian eagle-owl; the artist strikes a pose with one of his artworks;* Tau *at IFFCO Chowk is one of Namjoshi's noted works.*

MINDFUL MENTIONS

An eco-friendly destination on your bucket list
Costa Rica

Favourite conscious artists
Manjit Bava in India, Olafur Elassan (Danish Icelandic artist)

Tell us about the artworks that you made to increase awareness around wildlife conservation.
Elephantscape, exhibited in 2009, focussed on the misery of elephants being kept as chained slaves to tourism machinery, transporting foreign tourist up to the hilly fort of Amer. It involved many craftsmen from Rajasthan creating different elephants to showcase the subject. In 2017, on an invitation from Wildlife Trust of India, I created *An Elephant with Wings* in Delhi. It was a plea to find passage for elephants in the process of rapid urbanisation. In 2020, *Flight of Gurgaon* at MG road depicted the Indian eagle-owl found in the Northern Aravalli Range.

Tell us about your artwork at IFFCO Chowk? What does it signify?
Tau at IFFCO chowk is one of my premier works. Standing at eight metres, the work depicts a man in traditional Haryanvi attire, and is intended to articulate the convergence of our past and future and advocate the coexistence of these nuanced realities in a single space.

What does conscious travel mean to you?
Staying with local communities, exchanging cultural notes, trying their local cuisines, and upskilling with their practices in cuisine/medicine or sharing our knowledge to create a better life. I choose eco-friendly wildlife tours and activities that prioritise the welfare and conservation of animals/heritage and traditions.

Tell us about your future projects.
I am working on a multimedia wildlife travelling show and taking my *Birds of Aravallis* show exhibited in Museo Camera in 2023 to various international locations. Tigers and lions will be my muses in the upcoming projects. ✚

Travel + Leisure
India & South Asia

Experiences

TRAVELLERS' TALES, FROM NEAR AND FAR

INSIDE NATURE'S LARDER

A foraging trip across Nagaland teaches **JAPLEEN KAUR** valuable lessons in conscious living, community, and the Naga way of life.

Naga meal with pork, rice, and foraged greens.

THE AROMA OF FRESHLY prepared Naga beans curry wafted through the air. Two dogs lazed nearby; the drizzle outside had turned therapeutic. I dug into the sticky rice that was served with a side of pork cooked with banana stem. In the courtyard of a small church, somewhere in the Mon district of Nagaland, I felt welcomed in a way that I hadn't in a long, long time.

It was the early days of April; I had joined the team of Gurugram-based OMO cafe on a trip to Nagaland. The restaurant, helmed by three remarkable women—Deepika Sethi, chef Vanshika Bhatia, and Grace Muviah—prides itself on curating ingredient-first menus. They also regularly embark on sourcing trips across the country to bring back ingredients and stories that round off the dishes at OMO.

I got back from the trip with a journal full of lessons in community living, a deeper sense of appreciation for Naga food and cooking methods, and an overwhelming gratitude for the resident Nagas at OMO—Grace Muviah and Athan Zimik (the cultural chief at OMO)—who helped create genuine interactions and get honest insights.

"If a Naga family invites you to sit in their kitchen, it means that they trust you," said Zimik as we enjoyed hot mint tea in the kitchen of a Konyak tribe leader. There are as many as 17 Naga tribes in existence today, each with their own dialect, but one thing that binds them together is the love for Naga food and the kitchen that it's cooked in.

A typical Naga kitchen is designed in a way that the element of fire is at the centre. Meals are cooked over an open flame. The smoke drifts upwards towards the wood and bamboo shelves that are suspended from the ceiling. These racks are used to store pork, millets, and other meat, which are smoked over weeks as a method of preservation. Even leftover meat is kept here to be eaten later. This extremely slow process of cooking ensures that the nutrients stay intact.

A quintessential Naga meal would include rice, pork, *axone* or *akhuni* (fermented soybean) chutney, and many foraged greens, traditionally served piping hot, on bamboo plates. But my introduction to authentic Naga cuisine went beyond meat. At my dinner in the home of the daughter of the Konyak tribe leader, Lidang (who is also a food blogger), *bah nut* salad emerged as a clear winner. These wild nuts are tricky and take over a week to prep. When Anok, a coffee farmer, opened up his home for lunch, we were introduced to *aukat*, the shoots of a kind of peepal tree that has a leafy texture, almost like that of corn husk. It is sour and tangy, and widely used in curries for that zing, but I found myself enjoying it as is.

Muviah's sister and aunt cooked up a storm for us at the church; 80 per cent of that meal was vegetarian, and truly celebrated the local produce. "Banana stems are used in Naga households when seasons change, as they are great for immunity," explained Zimik as we savoured multiple servings of the unique preparation. The knowledge of how and when to use these indigenous ingredients is a treasure that is passed down generations.

One of the things that becomes strikingly obvious on spending time in Nagaland is how in sync with nature the locals are. This profound connection with nature is evident in their practices, ranging from worshipping the bamboo God to possessing knowledge about plants that can alleviate acidity.

▲ *From top: Nagaland's local produce includes millets such as* chirã, shéphul, chela, ofomm, waofri, *and* naam; *the knowledge of how and when to use indigenous ingredients is passed down generations. Below: A variety of the millet named séphuk .*

◀

A panoramic view of Chenwetnyu village.

One of the days we drove down to Longwa, the village that is right at Myanmar's border, to meet the chief who has a dual citizenship. There is a saying that describes this perfectly— 'the chief of Longwa dines in Myanmar and sleeps in India'. On the way back, Zimik and Bhatia stopped the cars in the middle of the road. Zimik had spotted leaves that we could have for dinner. Within minutes, the two of them had their hands full of plantain leaves, *hanahan* shoots that have a citrusy flavour, fish mint leaves that taste and smell just like its name, and tiny yellow flowers whose name no one could remember—it tasted slightly sweet and sour. I stood in awe, trying to capture this mini foraging haul, both on camera and in my memory.

"For ages, women, while going back home from farms, would forage greens as accompaniments for meals. These leaves are found in abundance, but they only pluck as much as they need, leaving the rest for others. This ensures that there is enough for the entire village and for the produce to keep growing in the wild", shares Zimik.

Wild Gems of Nagaland

Sharifa, *a part of the custard apple family, is grown in Nagaland and is loaded with antioxidants.*

Soreihan *or* aukat *has a citrusy flavour and is widely used in curries or eaten raw.*

A coffee flower transforms into a cherry.

Wild fiddle fig or machana *is generally cooked like a vegetable, but can be pickled as well.*

Séphuk *is one of the many varieties of millets grown in Nagaland.*

Soybean is fermented in a bamboo tube and ultimately becomes axone, which is widely used in Naga cooking.

From left: Lidang's father, a Konyak tribe leader, weaves a chicken coup; Puneeta Chadha (extreme left), an organic farmer from Gurugram, and Anok (extreme right), a coffee farmer from Nagaland, pose with two of the last few remaining Naga head hunters.

GETTING THERE
IndiGo (*goindigo.in*) and **Vistara** (*airvistara.com*) operate regular flights from major cities to Dibrugarh. From there, Mon is a six-hour drive.

STAY
NKK HOMESTAY is run by a local by the name of DR Eli. *Doubles from ₹1,800; +91 9862373525*

"One can just eat the *hanahan* shoots raw, but they also taste amazing in a salad, almost like a raw, wild green apple," Bhatia explains with child-like excitement.

The true meaning of 'brewed in nature' came up when we visited a nano-lot coffee estate in Mon that supplies beans to OMO's in-house coffee brand called Ngarum, the heart and brainchild of Grace Muviah. The estate, as Muviah puts it, is "jungle to cup, in the most real and wholesome manner."

Growing coffee in the Northeast is a new practice but the quality of arabica beans from this estate was at par with that of bigwig producers found elsewhere. A short hike, and we were surrounded by coffee plants with their flowers in bloom. Coffee here is 'shade grown', and the shade is provided by tall wild fruit trees, usually those of *kong*, a local fruit that resembles wild olive, unlike in South India where rose, pepper, and vanilla trees are grown for shade.

Bags of the green beans were packed to take back to Gurugram to be roasted at the right temperature to get that perfect cup of coffee. This is available at all times at Ngarum in OMO. "As recently as two days back, the entire village got millets, pulses, and greens from their homes, which we then ate together as a community using this long, wooden plate of sorts. It is a tradition that has been going on for as long as I can remember," said Chenngam, a farmer in the village of Chenwetnyu. I found the concept of a massive potluck and eating from the same vessel that is almost 10 feet long, beautiful.

Everything that the Nagas do revolves around farming seasons. They have two major festivals, one each for sowing and harvesting. I was lucky enough to be there during Aoelong, the spring festival of the Konyak tribe. People decked up in their local attire, flaunting beaded necklaces and elaborate headgear. There was dance, music, and copious amounts of rice beer. Though the untimely rain did dampen the mood of the spring festival celebrations, spirits were at an all-time high.

In the end, to honour all the meals we were served and the cultural heritage that we experienced, the team at OMO, including chef Bhatia, Zimik, Aadarsh Mishra (one of the chefs at OMO) prepared a vegetarian dinner using many of the local ingredients. The banana chilly fry with *timoor* (schezuan pepper) was my absolute favourite. The locals of Mon, too, sat down with us for this meal where their local ingredients got a unique twist. We had come full circle.

The Naga community taught me that living consciously means staying true to your culture, ancestors, traditions and uplifting your community. And even if you don't understand the language of a place, a smile will always do the trick.

LIFE ON THE MEKONG

Aboard a slow boat from Thailand to Laos, **NIVEDANA JALAN** embraces the rural life and forges beautiful connections.

The slow boat is a great way to experience the Mekong River and small villages along its banks.

ANNE-MARIE PALMER/ALAMY

"WANT TO TAKE a slow boat to Laos along the Mae Kong?" I was asked by a tour operator in Chiang Mai, Thailand, while casually sifting through tour brochures. "We can make arrangements for you." Interest piqued; I looked up at him immediately with a smile, "Tell me more."

Having lived and travelled in Southeast Asia for over a decade, I can safely say that the famed Mekong River cruise is, in some ways, a rite of passage for every visitor in continental Southeast Asia—Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. So, while the idea wasn't new to me as such, this two-day cruise on a slow boat seemed rather unique.

For starters, it wasn't just a joyride and was going to serve as a means of transportation to reach Luang Prabang, the erstwhile capital of Laos. In addition, this journey seemed like an incredible way to experience the river and the small villages along its banks, which I wouldn't typically visit independently.

Fast forward to the following week, I was enroute Chiang Khong, a quaint town on the Thailand border, the starting point of my cruise. After an overnight stay, I was whisked off at precisely 7 am by a tour representative.

All good things take time and patience, as did this. My first hour was spent at border control, but two immigrations later, I was finally driving along the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. I noticed that the Thai flags had been replaced by Laotian flags. We were now in Laos.

Soon enough, our minivan stopped, and we were asked to hop into our boat docked nearby. I took a quick look around and realised that we were now in Huay Xai, a small town on the Laotian border. We had simply cut across the Mekong, and I could still see my hotel in Chiang Khong on the other side of the river!

Eager to start my river journey, I quickly headed towards the long wooden boat that awaited me. From outside, it looked like one of the standard river taxis that are often seen along the Mekong, but upon a closer look, I realised that it had undergone a complete makeover to make it cruise-worthy.

The boat had been remodelled like a casual al fresco restaurant, with benches, tables and day beds decorated with colourful cushions and draped with warm blankets. There was a kitchen and bathroom at the back, as well as a bar in the corner, overlooking the river. It was definitely larger and sleeker than what I'd expected.

Soon, all the travellers were seated, and we began the journey we'd all been awaiting eagerly—cruising along the mighty Mekong.

The start of anything new is always exciting, but in this particular instance, even more so because for the first hour, we were sailing between two countries. It was rather exhilarating to see Laos on the left and Thailand on the right, while we were on the waterway right in the middle of both.

▸ Kaeng khiao wan *is a popular Laotian dish. Above: The slow boat looks like a standard river taxi but its interiors are sleeker.*

FROM TOP: SHUTTERSTOCK; AMANDA AHN/ALAMY

▲
The village of Pakbeng in Laos is one of the pit stops on the journey. Left: The slow boat ride offers beautiful vistas along the Mekong.

Slowly, we left Thailand behind as we followed the Mekong into Laos; the water got deeper, and currents got stronger. Enroute, we passed tiny villages and large plantations, small fishing boats and massive cruise ships, children playing and adults doing daily chores. Many waved enthusiastically when they spotted our boat. The energy was infectious, and I couldn't help but grin and wave back.

Soon, it was time for lunch; the organisers had laid out a buffet. I was excited to try Laotian cuisine for the very first time, and as I approached the food counter, I was greeted by familiar dishes like *laab* (minced meat salad), *tam som* (papaya salad) and *kaeng khiao wan* (green curry)! Turns out, like most neighbouring countries of the world, there's a striking similarity in the cooking styles and dishes of Laos and Thailand. I also had the chance to try several unique dishes from Laos the following day and realised that the dishes that had previously seemed Thai to me were, in fact, Lao variants.

I firmly believe that nothing brings people together like the love for food, and the group dynamic post lunch was proof of that. What started off as polite pleasantries turned into a party with some locally brewed BeerLao and lots of laughter.

The village of Pakbeng was our pitstop for the night. As if on schedule, the sun began setting as soon as I checked into my room from where I had unobstructed landscape views of the Mekong surrounded by magnificent limestone cliffs. Never one to miss a beautiful sunset, I watched the rays playfully dance on the soft waves of the river as the sun slowly disappeared behind the mountains.

The next morning, we were back on the boat at sunrise. As our boat picked up speed, the slight nip in the air became a strong breeze, and 20 sleepy travellers bundled themselves up in jackets and warm blankets, quietly enjoying the beautiful Laotian countryside. The day wasn't just about the boat ride though—we made a few stops along the way, to visit artisan villages as well as a unique cave temple.

The village of Ban Xang Hai was one such stop, where we met a whiskey producer, who then proceeded to show us how traditional Lao rice wine and whiskeys (known as Lao-Lao) are produced. His distillery setup was rather basic and makeshift, but his enthusiasm and creativity made up for that. I was also excited at the chance to taste (and buy) these spirits, directly from the source!

The true gauge of a nation's friendliness, in my opinion, lies in its heartlands, in the people who live in its rural areas. This belief was reaffirmed with each interaction I had over the two days on the slow boat. Each person I met along the way—be it the boat crew, passersby, villagers, or vendors—was more welcoming and friendlier than the last.

In no time (or so it seemed), we reached Luang Prabang, our destination. It was time to say goodbye to the Mekong and my new friends. I couldn't help but wonder if I'd ever return, if I'd ever see these people again. But one thing was certain—these fleeting connections I had made throughout my journey would stay with me forever.

GETTING THERE

Thai Airways (*thaiairways.com*) and **Thai Lion Air** (*lionairthai.com*) operate regular flights to Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai via Bangkok, from major Indian cities. From there, any tour company or Grab taxi can arrange a drop off to the town of Chiang Khong, which serves as the base for the journey.

BEST TIME TO VISIT

November to February is the ideal time to plan this journey, as the weather is pleasant with an average daily temperature of 23°C.

TOUR

The easiest way to take the slow boat to Luang Prabang is via a tour.

Nagi of Mekong (*nagiofmekong.com*) and **Shompoo** (*shompoo-cruise.com*) offer two-day cruises (*₹12,317 to ₹20,528*) inclusive of all transport from Chiang Khong to Luang Prabang, two lunches on board, visits along the way, guide, coffee, tea, water, snacks, and overnight stay in Pak Beng in a two/three/four-star hotel with breakfast.

FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK; NIVEDANA JALAN

CHECK IN

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD P. 84
QUEST FOR QUIETUDE P. 86
NATURE'S WHIMSY P. 88

▲
JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa is spread across 22 acres in the Nandi Hills.

COURTESY OF JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE GOLFSHIRE RESORT & SPA

Mulberry Hills is located at the foothills of Nandi Hills.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

An oasis of tranquillity, Mulberry Shades Nandi Hills in Bengaluru offers city-weary travellers an apt place to unwind, rejuvenate, and connect with nature. **BY CHIRAG MOHANTY SAMAL**

LOCATED ON THE foothills of Nandi Hills, Mulberry Shades Nandi Hills Bengaluru, a Tribute Portfolio Resort, is an addition to Marriott International's expanding collection of independent boutique properties.

Conveniently located just about 25 minutes from Kempegowda International Airport, the property is an oasis of tranquillity far from the hustle and bustle of the city. The earthy tones used in the architecture and interiors, sloping tiled roofs, and round pillars that you find in the property are reminiscent of old South Indian homes. That's why when I stepped into the resort and was warmly greeted by the hotel staff, I instantly felt at home. Mulberry Shades feels like an intimate space where you can let your guard down and relax.

The lush greenery all around, the blooming flowers, quiet green corners, and gardens are an effective stress reliever. The property has been built in a way to blend with the surroundings. Wooden elements and muted tones have been used throughout, and Nandi Hills provides a stunning backdrop and add to the feeling of serenity.

The new boutique hotel has 102 well-appointed spacious villas and suites. Each bungalow comes with a living room, bedroom, ensuite bathroom, and a private

The pillars at the property are reminiscent of old South Indian homes.

COURTESY OF MARRIOTT

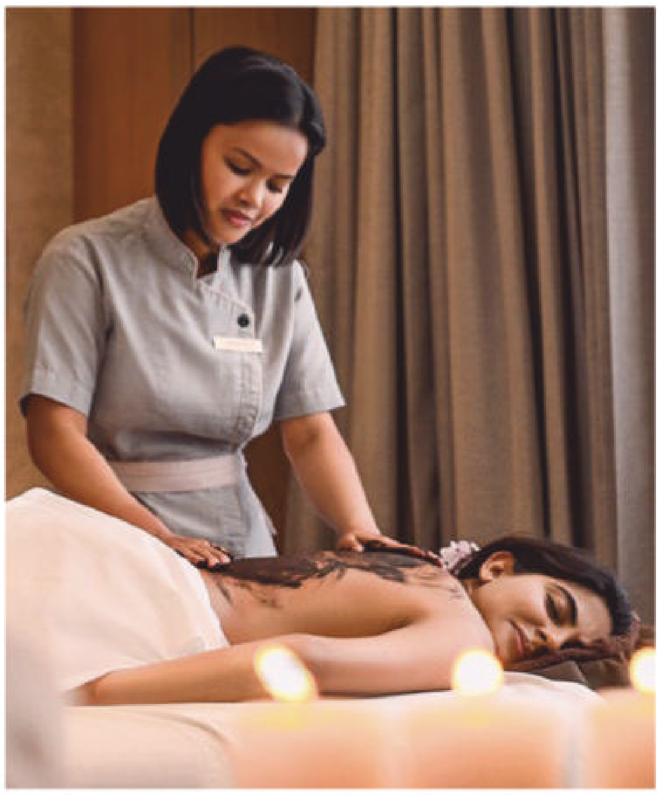
▲

Clockwise: Heritage King bedroom at the property; the interiors are done up in earthy tones; Ksema spa features six treatment rooms, one Turkish hammam, a private jacuzzi, and a steam and sauna room.

veranda. Designed by Hirsch Bedner Associates Singapore, the property exudes an old-world charm but has a contemporary edge. The carpets, art works, and handpicked accessories in natural textures all reflect nature. There are 44 traditional rooms, 40 heritage rooms, 14 bungalows, and four luxury suites.

The room that I stayed in was spacious and done up in shades of beige. The French windows opened to a veranda overlooking the Nandi Hills and blooming Tabebuia trees with vibrant flowers that resembled cherry blossoms. The veranda is ideal to catch up on slow conversations with a loved one or to just listen to the chirping of the birds from the nearby trees.

Pathways have been carefully laid out around the gardens to encourage guests to take walks and admire the beauty of nature. The in-house gym also offers stunning views of sun setting atop Nandi Hills.



For sore muscles, Ksema, the in-house spa has a range of signature treatments and therapies that not only soothe tired nerves and muscles but also put the mind at rest. The spa features six treatment rooms, one Turkish hammam, a private jacuzzi, and a steam and sauna room. I signed up for one of their signature full body massages and the skilled masseuse banished all signs of fatigue from my body. The fragrant oils were a treat for the senses, and I emerged fresh and invigorated from my session.

There is also Terra, the restaurant that serves delectable South Indian food with a modern twist. Soft idlis, crispy dosas, and flavourful *upma* served at breakfast are just what you need to start your day on a good note. Lunch and dinner too are elaborate affairs as the chef rustles up a variety of fish, chicken, and sea food dishes with the right accompaniments. Be it the flaky Malabari *porottas* or soft *neer* dosas, the chef knows how to put you in a good mood.

Asri, the pool bar, follows a garden-to-glass concept and uses herbs grown on the property in the drinks. Though the ingredients might be local, the concoctions that the mixologist creates are delicious and lull you into languor.

If you are in a mood to skip the drinks and grab a strong coffee instead, Kokoon has you covered. The coffee house serves local brews and delicious cakes, pastries, tarts, croissants, breads, and sandwiches, along with other small bites.

If you plan to travel with your furry friend, look no further as the resort is also pet-friendly. All the city-weary souls like me, looking for some quiet time to rejuvenate and relax will find a home at Mulberry Shades.

GETTING THERE

Kempegowda International Airport is a 30-minute ride from the resort. **IndiGo** (*goindigo.in*) and **Air India** (*airindia.in*) operate regular flights from all major cities to Bengaluru.

TARIFF

Doubles start from ₹18,500 plus taxes. *marriott.com*

QUEST FOR QUIETUDE

After a month of never-ending work days and personal loss, **BAYAR JAIN** checks into Amal Tamara in Kerala in search of calm.

AS I FILTER THROUGH my mails, a subject line catches my eye: Follow up consultation. Instantly, memories of Amal Tamara come rushing back.

It was October 2022. And it was going by in a blur partly due to long work days and partly in coping with the loss of a loved one. From where I stood, any semblance of quietude seemed miles away, roughly 1,700 miles from New Delhi, all the way in Mannancherry, a small village in the Alappuzha district of Kerala. At Amal Tamara.

Surrounded by the beautiful Vembanad Lake and set amid swaying palm trees, Amal Tamara (*amaltamara.com*) creates the ideal ambience to relax the mind. As I sat in the waiting area, fresh coconut water straight from the shell was offered to get rid of travel fatigue. Interiors here are designed like a traditional *nalukettu* (traditional homes of joint families in Kerala)—a rectangular structure with four blocks that are linked by an open courtyard.

On one end, wooden shelves are lined with traditional games like *pallanguzhi*, marbles, and *chaupad*. On the other, beyond the central courtyard, a plethora of dried medicinal herbs generate intense aromas. There's *gokshura* for treating urinary disorders, *kapikachhu* or velvet beans for maintaining a healthy nervous system, *pippali* for respiratory ailments and improving metabolism, *thakkola* for digestion, and many more. A blackboard caught my eye: 'Clarity within leads to clarity outside', it read in cursive penmanship. Ironically, clarity is exactly what I lacked at the moment. Then again, the Amal Way of Life promises to help achieve balance of body, mind, and spirit. So, there was hope.

▲ *The property is surrounded by the Vembanad Lake. Below: Amal Tamara has 19 rooms in three accommodation types.*

COURTESY OF AMAL TAMARA

▲
Clockwise: Each meal at the resort is portion-controlled and individualised; the property offers various massage tretaments with therapeutic oils; Amal Tamara has a 'detox water of the day' with various herbal infusions.

My journey towards well-being began with an Ayurvedic consultation. The key to holistic healing is a personalised programme tailored to individuals or Amal Yatris as the boutique property addresses their guests. For me, senior Ayurveda physician Dr Haripriya S Bonsalay kick-started this process. Over an hour-long one-on-one, Dr Bonsalay not only debunked Ayurveda for me, but also took detailed notes of my health—physical, emotional, behavioural, and mental. Conclusively, she explained, "You've got a *kapha dosha* body type."

For the uninitiated, according to Ayurveda, every human manifests three biological energies—*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. While each person is said to have a blend of the three energies, it is the unique ratio of the *doshas* that defines one's Ayurvedic constitution, which serves as a blueprint for achieving optimal health. To achieve balance, Amal Tamara offers a range of curative programmes ranging from seven, 14, 21, and 28 days. With my consultations done, the next few days were reserved for therapies, treatments, and a crash course on the ancient medicine. My mornings started with *agnihothram* (a purifying Vedic fire ceremony), guided yoga sessions, and sun salutations with Dr Atul Vivek, the resort's naturopathy physician and yoga consultant; while days ended with meditation sessions and *deepam* (a traditional oil lamp ritual to bring positivity). Through the day, I'd got doused in soothing therapeutic oils for various massage treatments; enlightened about Kashayapura (Ayurvedic design) and medications at the in-house apothecary; acquainted with medicinal plants at the Nakshatra Vanam, an herbal garden home to 27 species of trees representing Indian astrology; and accompanied by an Ayurveda expert while strolling along the Dhanwanthari walkway or spiral walkway and learning more about the ancient school of wisdom. By dusk, I'd retire to my cosy room watching the sun melt into the glistening, calm waters.

Amal Tamara has 19 rooms in three accommodation types: Astha, Ekta, and Idha. As Amal Yatris ordinarily stay for longer durations, each room guarantees homely comforts. Each space is done up in elegant hardwood furniture and earthy-toned furnishings, and has private balconies overlooking the backwaters.

Healing at Amal Tamara, however, is not just about treatments. Putting the spotlight on light food, each meal at the resort is individualised based on daily consultations and dietician recommendations. These portion-controlled meals—all vegetarian, leaning towards vegan—are crafted using organic ingredients. Every day, the team has a 'detox water of the day' with various herbal infusions in warm water.

Months later, I find myself boiling cups of detox water every time I feel under the weather. Walks, too, have become a part of my wellness routine. I might have left Amal Tamara, but the Amal Yatri life lingers on. And as far as clarity is concerned? Turns out it was hidden within me all along. +

GETTING THERE
Cochin International Airport, roughly 75 kilometres, is the closest airport from Amal Tamara. All major airlines offer non-stop and connecting flights from major Indian cities.

TARIFF
Amal Tamara offers all-inclusive packages in variations of seven, 14, or 21 nights, starting at ₹1,35,361 for single occupancy. *amaltamara.com*

NATURE'S WHIMSY

Located at the foothills of Nandi Hills in Bengaluru, JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa offers a quiet getaway to reconnect with nature. **BY CHIRAG MOHANTY SAMAL**

HAVE YOU EVER imagined stepping into a green world and disconnecting from the drudgery of routine? Thoughts like these often circle my mind like a swarm of bees. And the thought turned into reality on a recent visit to JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa located at the foothills of Nandi Hills, Bengaluru.

The resort is set on 22 acres and is a microcosm of a utopian world. The moment you step into the premises, expansive stretches of the 18-hole golf course, the lagoon around it, trees, bushes, and manicured lawns stare at you. The glass facade of the property allows you to soak in the view outside as do the outdoor dining options. In fact, all the 301 rooms and suites in the property come with a private balcony or a sit-out space to enjoy the outdoors. The easy accessibility to nature had a therapeutic effect on me; the fabulous Bengaluru weather further enhanced the experience.

I stayed at the spacious Pool Villa overlooking the gold course. The villa comes with a living room, bedroom, walk-in closet, private pool, kitchen, an outdoor jacuzzi, and two bathrooms. Modern amenities like a fully automatic smart WC, two flat screen LED TV, air conditioner,

▲ *Clockwise from above: JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa is set on 22 acres; the hotel also boasts an 18-hole golf course surrounded by a lagoon; each room comes with a private balcony or sit-out space.*

COURTESY OF JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE GOLFSHIRE RESORT & SPA

◂ *Clockwise from here: The Aviary is an all-day diner; Aaleeshan serves Awadhi cuisine in an opulent setting; the property's spa offers facials, body scrubs, Ayurvedic treatments, and wraps.*

high-speed internet, and impeccable service ensure you spend a leisurely time.

In the afternoon, the staff laid out the tea, hors d'oeuvres, and dessert in my room. To me it came across as a well-planned surprise. There's also a night ritual that deserves special mention. On the first night, it was a DIY pedicure with Forest Essentials products, and on the second night, there were a set of calming balms and fragrances to lull me into peaceful slumber.

However, despite the luxurious room, I was tempted to explore the open spaces in the property. So, I paid a visit to Halli Katte, a set-up in the centre of the resort, which is open to all in-house guests. An artist was conducting a painting workshop with guests who were busy working on their canvas. To the side, there was a row of wooden carts laden with snacks and beverages to choose from. For guests travelling with kids, there's a kids' zone featuring a bowling alley, video games, billiards, and foosball. There's also an exclusive swimming pool for them. On Saturdays, the resort screens a movie under the stars, which can be enjoyed on bean bags, with popcorn served on the house.

The in-house spa offers relaxing therapies and treatments in a beautiful setting. The Spa by JW blends with the surroundings with its six overwater treatment villas that have a deck over an artificial lake with a view of the hills in the distance. The spa also has two couple treatment rooms, manicure and pedicure stations, a salon, steam and jacuzzi, and a temperature-controlled lagoon pool. The extensive spa menu offers Ayurvedic treatments, facials, body scrubs, wraps, and more. There's an array of oils to choose from basis your mood and requirements.

When it comes to dining options, The Aviary, the all-day diner, lets you eat a meal with a side of birding. With tables around the lagoon, the space is frequented by a large variety of birds. If you can't identify the species that flutter by your tables, the servers are quick to help with the correct names. The pan-Asian restaurant East has indoor and outdoor seating and serves a cross section of Korean, Japanese, Thai, and Chinese cuisine. If you crave Indian food, head to Aaleeshan, the fine-dining restaurant serving Awadhi cuisine in an opulent setting.

Conveniently located at an hour's drive from Bengaluru, the resort also serves as ideal spot for weddings and pre-wedding functions. So be prepared to find guests dressed to the nines in the wedding season. If you are looking for a quiet getaway, avoid the wedding season or spend time in the quieter corners in the vast property. ✦

GETTING THERE

The property is 20 minutes from **Kempegowda International Airport. IndiGo** (*goindigo.in*) and **Air India** (*airindia.com*) operate regular flights from all major cities to Bengaluru.

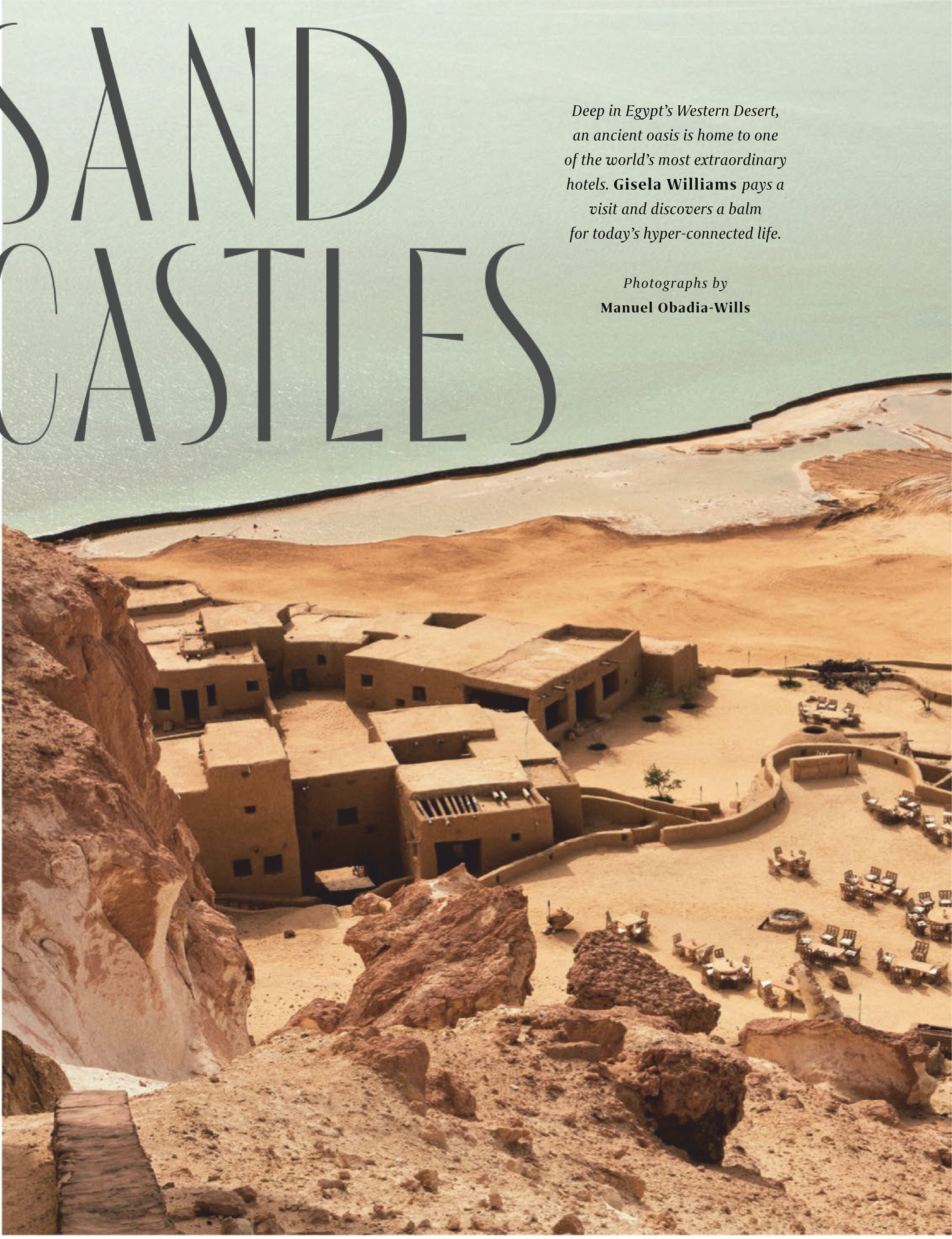
TARIFF

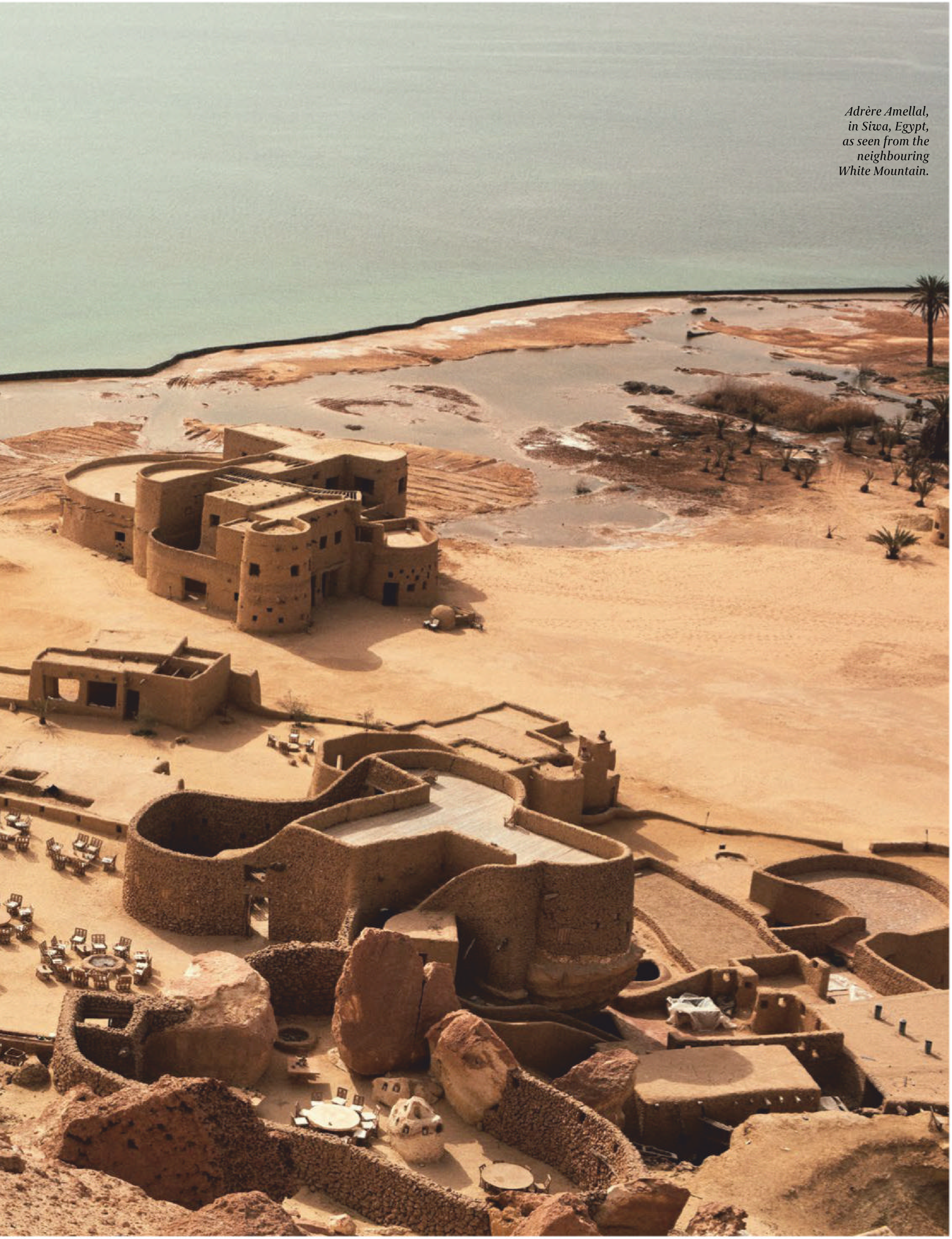
Doubles start from ₹20,000; marriott.com

SAND CASTLES

Deep in Egypt's Western Desert, an ancient oasis is home to one of the world's most extraordinary hotels. **Gisela Williams** *pays a visit and discovers a balm for today's hyper-connected life.*

Photographs by
Manuel Obadia-Wills





Adrère Amellal, in Siwa, Egypt, as seen from the neighbouring White Mountain.

FROM THE PLANE, I looked down on a patchwork of emerald palm groves, rows of silver olive trees, and vast salt-ringed lakes that seemed to glow in psychedelic shades of cerulean and aquamarine. Surrounding these pockets of lushness was an ocean of sand, and the combination filled me with a sense of isolation that was almost overwhelming.

I was about to land in Siwa, an oasis in Egypt that includes a town of 20,000 people, a few historically significant sites, and a handful of small hotels. It lies about 563 kilometres west of Cairo as the crow flies, and 48 kilometres east of the Libyan border.

My journey had been more than 20 years in the making, sparked by a conversation with Peter Beard, the legendary photographer, artist, and writer. He had told me that one of his favourite hotels was a place called Adrère Amellal, which resembled a fortress made of sand in Egypt's Western Desert.

The hotel was in Siwa, a place that, he explained, was part of Egypt but had the feeling of an independent state: for millennia, generations of Berber tribes had lived there under their own laws. The heart of ancient Siwa was Shali (now also known as the Old Town), a fortified village built in the 13th century to protect the community from attacks by neighboring tribes.

In 1926, a series of massive rainstorms destroyed many of Shali's buildings, which were made *kershef,* a mixture of salt and clay. And while some of those structures still stand, the residents of modern Siwa—the majority of whom are descendants of the Berbers—live nearby in homes made of stone. The streets buzz with motorbikes and vendors selling falafel and fresh *aish baladi,* the ubiquitous traditional flatbread.

The Old Town, meanwhile, resembles an archaeological relic, although it is slowly being restored by private citizens. One of them is Adrère Amellal's creator, Mounir Neamatalla. A Cairo native who holds a Ph.D. from Columbia University, he founded Environmental Quality International (EQI), a consulting company that is the driving force behind some of the country's most significant preservation projects. Neamatalla and I shared a common friend in Louis Barthélemy, a French artist, who lives part-time in Cairo. He caught wind of my fascination with Siwa last year and offered an introduction—and the impetus to finally make a trip.

A quick phone call was all it took to garner an invitation from Neamatalla to join him at Adrère Amellal over Easter weekend. There are no regularly scheduled commercial flights to Siwa, so I joined a charter, which brought us from Cairo International to Siwa's tiny military airport in 90 minutes. (Going by car from the capital takes 12 hours along the coast on bumpy, mostly empty roads. Drivers often break up the long journey with a stop in the resort town of Matruh, which sits on the Mediterranean Sea. Aside from the glorious white-sand beaches, history buffs can examine several World War II shipwrecks along the coast.)

AFTER MORE THAN two decades of anticipation, arriving at Adrère Amellal felt almost surreal. From a distance, the buildings appeared to emerge organically from the sand, and then later to disappear into the nearby cliffs of the giant, table-topped White Mountain, which towers over the hotel.

My room, which overlooked a lake and a grid of organic vegetable beds, was simply furnished, with a packed-earth floor covered in handwoven rugs, a comfortable king-size bed, and a fireplace. Most of the furniture was made with palm fronds, and thoughtfully placed windows allowed the circulation of even the faintest breeze—an important detail in a place where daytime temperatures in the summer can reach 100 degrees. There is no air-conditioning or electricity; at night, guests make their way by the light of candles and lanterns. A massive spring-fed pool was perfect for taking a cooling dip.

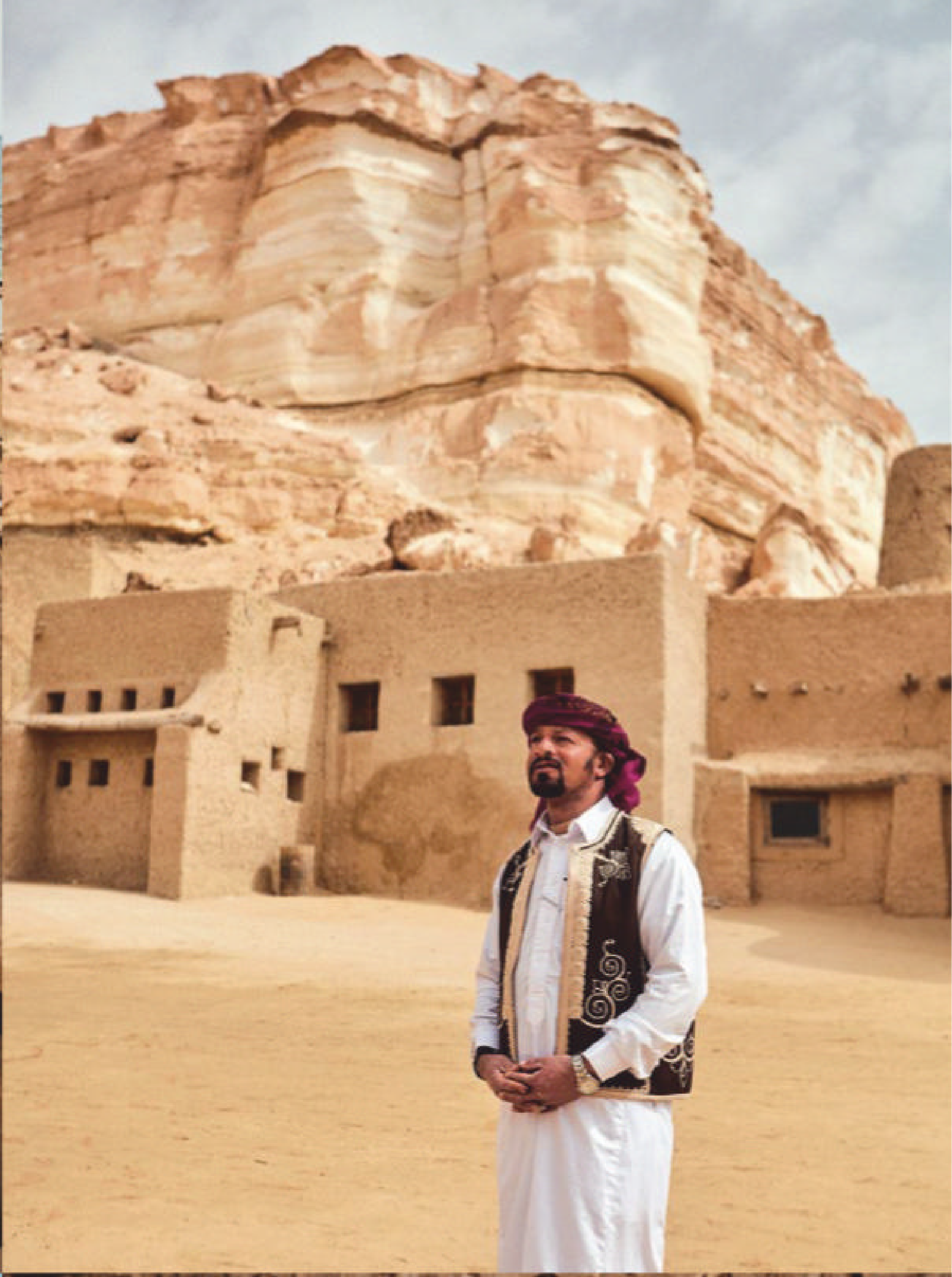
Over mint tea in one of the hotel's lounges, Neamatalla—casually but impeccably dressed in a linen shirt and pants, with a safari hat to shield himself from the Egyptian glare—explained how he came to Siwa.

In 1996, Neamatalla was 50 years old and at a crossroads in his career. EQI was up and running, and he had been working for decades with the government to create a more sustainable waste system for Cairo. When an anthropologist colleague suggested he visit Siwa and explore its ruins, Neamatalla readily agreed.

"We arrived after twelve hours of driving, and the sun was about to go down," he said. "I remember lifting my eyes and seeing White Mountain, and directly in front of me the fortress of Shali. I immediately recognised that my fate was tied to these two places." The seemingly mystical pull that Siwa had on Neamatalla led to the idea for Adrère Amellal, which means "White Mountain" in the local Berber dialect. The purpose was to create a sanctuary, a place where his friends and acquaintances could get away from modern life in the vastness of the desert.

Construction of the complex, which took nearly four years, was guided by its relation to the mountain. "Every morning I would look at the volume of the proposed

Opposite, clockwise from top left: The buildings of Adrère Amellal, which sit beside Siwa Lake, are made of a mixture of salt and clay; the hotel's manager, Mohamed Gegal, with White Mountain in the background; thick walls shield guest rooms from the desert heat; a guest dips her toes in the salty waters of the lake.



Opposite, clockwise from top left: Off-roading on desert dunes, a popular excursion in Siwa; Adrère Amellal's spring-fed pool; Mounir Neamatalla, founder of the hotel; a staff member preparing candlesticks—an important resource at this electricity-free hotel.

Into the Desert

GETTING THERE

EGYPTAIR (*egyptair.com*) operates regular, direct flights from New Delhi and Mumbai to Cairo. From there, Adrère Amellal is a 12-hour drive.

STAY

Adrère Amellal
The vision of Mounir Neamatalla, this 39-room hotel is a compound of nine structures, all built by hand, with a spring-fed swimming pool. There is no electricity or Wi-Fi, so guests are able to fully connect with the desert surroundings. *Doubles from ₹56,789; adrereamellal.com*

VISIT

Shali Fortress
This historic village, founded by Berbers in the 13th century, offers a glimpse of Siwa's ancient life.

Temple of the Oracle of Amun
The ruins of this religious structure dedicated to Amun—one of the most widely worshipped deities in the ancient world—was a pilgrimage site of Alexander the Great.

architecture, and if I felt something was intruding on the mountain I would take it away," he said. Neamatalla gives much credit to his longtime collaborator and cousin, the Iranian-Egyptian architect and designer India Mahdavi. "The creation of Adrère Amellal was possibly the freest way of building there is," Mahdavi told me from her office in Paris. "Construction took place without blueprints. We made traces on the soil before mud and salt blocks were piled up to raise an edifice that is in consonance with its environment."

AT DUSK ON my first night, I followed a winding path of flickering lanterns to a firepit where drinks were being served. A couple of gin and tonics later, guests were led to a series of tables set for eight people. ("Eight is the ideal number for unified conversation," Neamatalla told me.) I would find out that dinner locations change every night, but are often outdoors, under the stars. Instead of printed menus, a three-course meal of vegetable-dominated, Mediterranean-inspired dishes would appear, served on vintage silver platters. All of the organic produce and herbs used are grown on site. My favorites included hibiscus risotto and *zahret koussa*—zucchini flowers stuffed with vegetables and fragrant herbs—along with a delicate date soufflé.

The hotel offers more activities than I could fit into my three-day stay: hikes up White Mountain, desert 4 x 4 drives; dips in salt lakes; and excursions to extraordinary historic sites like the Temple of the Oracle of Amun, where Alexander the Great paid homage in 331 BC. Surprisingly, I found that I didn't miss electricity or Wi-Fi at all, and in the evening, their absence not only seemed to heighten my senses but also allowed for a profound sense of peace amid the desert landscape. In a post-pandemic world, I thought, this is really what everyone is searching for—a place to disconnect and reconnect.

Part of that connection is creative collaboration. For the past two decades, Neamatalla; his sister, Laila Neamatalla, a jewellery designer who champions Egyptian craft; and Mahdavi have commissioned work from locals like the salt-carving artisan Sayed Aboul Qassem Omar and master embroiderer Faiza Soliman Abdel Salam. Their work is sold both at the hotel and in Cairo's top design showrooms, thanks to Laila's connections. Barthélemy also collaborated with Siwa craftswomen on a fashion line, Udjat, that is now sold at the property.

On my final morning, I drove the half-hour from Adrère Amellal to Old Town to see the fruits of EQI's long-standing project, the Siwa Sustainable Development Initiative. It encompasses several building renovations, where locals are trained in *kershef* building techniques. I was met by crumbling façades reminiscent of jagged teeth, like a sandy-hued Dalí painting come to life. Amid the ruins, the three dozen fully restored buildings stood triumphant. These included two ancient mosques and a space that is used as a health clinic.

Neamatalla has also partnered with Egypt's Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities to create a pioneering museum. The Siwa Fine Art Museum's master plan is to exhibit a collection of artifacts from Siwa in a labyrinth of former dwellings, with each room dedicated to a single object. It is set to open in 2025.

"An oasis like Siwa is a design laboratory where we learn, on a micro scale, the results of sensitive interventions," Neamatalla told me on my last night over shish kebabs and pumpkin couscous. In a place that's defined by the ancient, it felt as if Siwa was also a harbinger of what thoughtful stewardship could mean for the future.

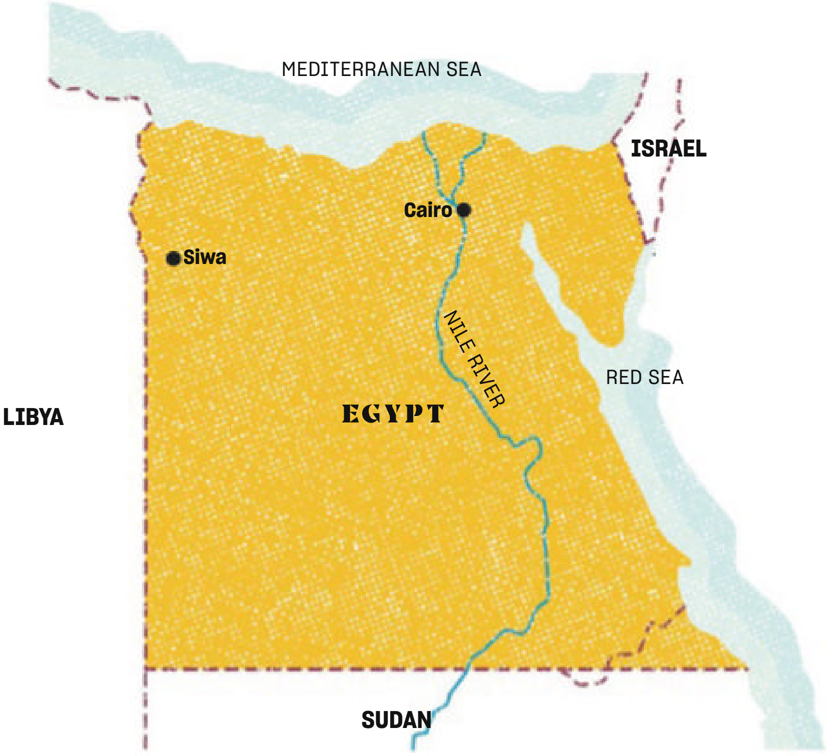
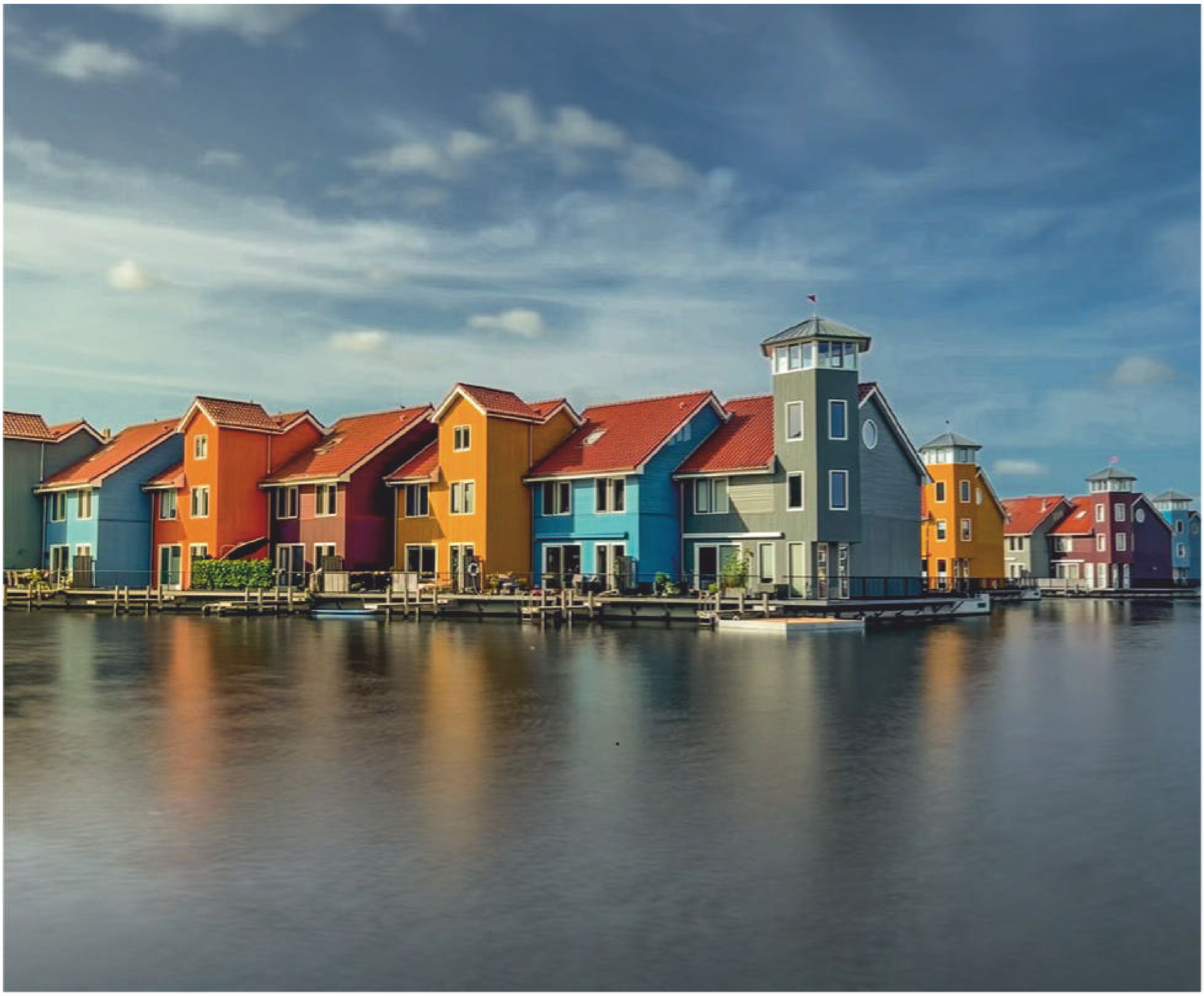


ILLUSTRATION BY DONOUGH O'MALLEY



YOUR BEST SHOT

THIS IS A PHOTOGRAPH of the colourful Dutch houses on the harbour of the bustling city of Groningen in the Netherlands. I made a day trip to this city located in the northern part of the country. It has a rich culture and is abuzz with events, historic monuments, great shopping districts, excellent restaurants, and a beautiful coastline. I clicked this while relaxing by the harbour. It truly brightened my trip!

—RAMYA BALKUR ON HER PHOTOGRAPH, TAKEN WITH AN IPHONE 13 PRO MAX ON MAY 18, 2023.

Ramya Balkur was an entrant in our ongoing 'Your Best Shot' contest. Submit your best shots at *tplusl@burdaluxury.com*, or use the hashtag *#telltnlindia* and tag *@travelandleisureindia* on Instagram, to stand a chance to get featured on this page.

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